



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

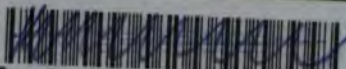
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



A

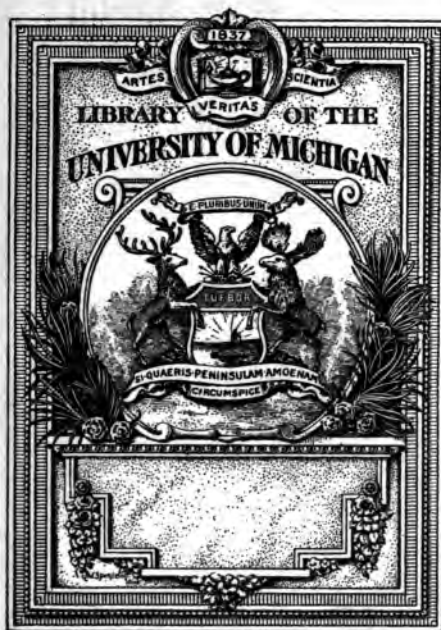
3 9015 00397 382 6

University of Michigan – BUHR

IDYLLISTS
OF THE
COUNTRY
SIDE



1944





1

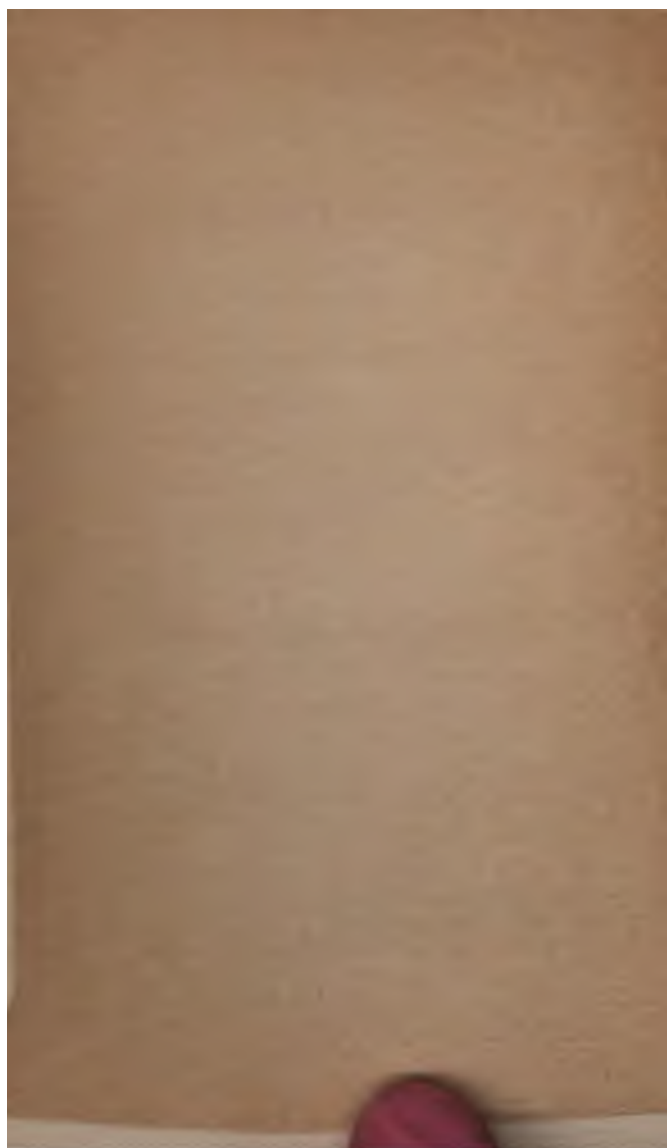
•

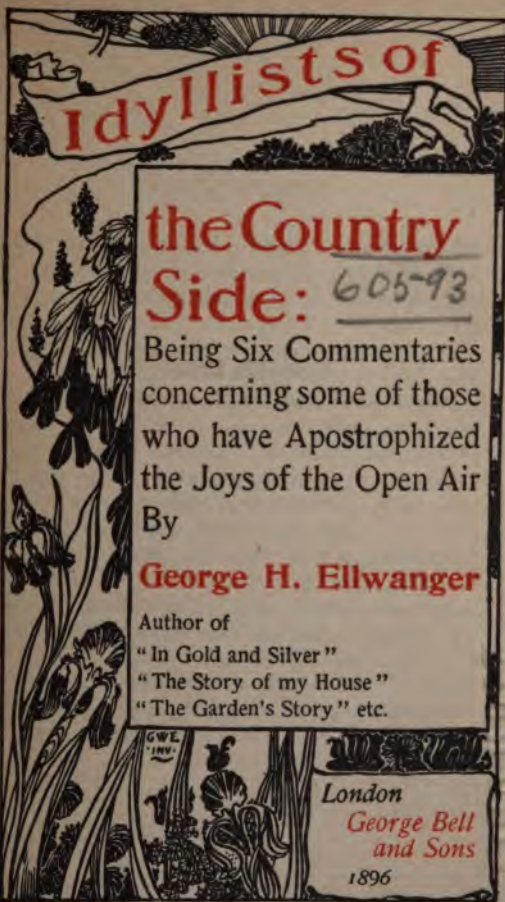


**IDYLLISTS OF THE
COUNTRY-SIDE. BY
G. H. ELLWANGER.**

. . . . each still report
That Nature utters from her rural shrine.

WORDSWORTH.





University Press :
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

FOREWORD.

OF the Idyllists who form the subject-matter of the present volume, the majority have been reviewed so frequently, and, in numerous instances, by such distinguished hands, that any further reference may seem uncalled for.

To this it may be briefly stated that each eye regards things differently, and mirrors impressions from a variant point of view. Indeed, many striking characteristics of the authors under consideration have not been touched upon by their commentators, or at least have received but a passing glance.

It was deemed, moreover, that a grouping of those who have written most pleasingly of the Country-Side, together with comparative references to their scope and method, would prove of interest to all those who possess a love for Nature and Nature's works, — that Nature who alone from spring to spring retains her youth, and whose charms remain forever new.

G. H. E.

Schönberg, ROCHESTER, 1895.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE WAND OF WALTON	9
GILBERT WHITE'S PASTORAL	47
THE LANDSCAPE OF THOMAS HARDY	85
AFIELD WITH JEFFERIES	123
THE SPHERE OF THOREAU	173
A RAMBLE WITH BURROUGHS	221

THE WAND OF WALTON.

.

IDYLLISTS
OF
THE COUNTRY-SIDE.



THE WAND OF WALTON.

Sometimes an angler comes and drops his hook
Within its hidden depths, and 'gainst a tree
Leaning his rod, reads in some pleasant book,
Forgetting soon his pride of fishery ;
 And dreams or falls asleep,
 While curious fishes peep
About his nibbled bait, or scornfully
 Dart off and rise and leap.

ROBERT BRIDGES: *The Shorter Poems.*

IT was in no wise essential that the delights of the water-side should have been extolled by Walton to be generally appreciated, or to enhance the pleasures of what is supremely the Contemplative Man's recreation. To the pastime of Angling, neverthe-

less, *The Compleat Angler* has added a finer grace, and to flowing waters imparted a sweeter sound. What Gilbert White accomplished within his chosen province, — the development of a closer attention to the beauties of outward Nature, — Walton had equally furthered more than a century previous in his favourite pursuit. That his idyllium was modelled to a considerable extent after the plan of *The Whole Art Of Hvsbandry* of Heresbachius, and of *The Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* of Dame Julyans, or Juliana Berners, or whoever its author may have been, is of little consequence: the key of angling pleasures was pitched at the meeting of “Piscator” and “Venator” on Tottenham Hill, on a certain fine pleasant fresh *May day*, in the morning, when hawthorns shed their fragrance and meads were pranked with flowers; and Walton fingered the reed.

To expect absolute originality in the treatment of any subject, even during olden days when the multiplicity of books had already become a vexation, were to seek for the philosopher's stone. *Æons* ago, it had been declared there was nothing new but what had been forgotten; and in order to learn the new, one must search the

old. Man had angled before Walton's time, and man had written of angling; but none had alluded to it; at least no prose-writer had referred to it with the unbounded love with which he has invested the theme in his sprightly dissertation. And not unlike *Selborne*, its immortality is largely due to its simple style and freshness. In both of these pastorals there is distilled the fragrance of peace and contentment, as from some golden censer. Both savour of "Art and Honesty, two things now strangers with many authors;" and in the writing of each, a recreation was "made of a recreation."

No sport embraces so extensive a literature or has been so enthusiastically considered as that which descants upon the

"dancing cork and bending reed,"

or which treats of the fascinations accompanying the poetic pastime of the fly-fisher. This intense love for angling, common alike to young and old when enthusiasm has once been kindled, is due not only to the restful scenes amid which it is usually practised, but to its being generally formed during early youth. Nor is it to be wondered at that its devotees should regard it with such tender

12 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

reverence. Beyond all other recreations it is the most idyllic, if one but select the trout for a guide. He is the certain index, the infallible cicerone to lovely scenery. With every bend and reach of his fluvial highway he opens fresh vistas of beauty, — himself as pure and undefiled as the element wherein he roves. All the surroundings of the trout-stream invite to a restful frame of mind, — the minstrelsy of birds, the cool rush of the rapid, the wild flora, the myriad insect life that hovers above the current, the peace of great woods through which the streamlet flows, its soothing voice and dreamy, somnolent song. To the sport, moreover, is invariably added the component of uncertainty which imparts an increased zest to any pleasure. Fish are proverbially fickle — creatures of the moment and the hour : —

“ For there are times in which they will not bite,
But do forbear, and from their food refrain ;
And days there are wherein they more delight
To labour for the same, and bite amain.”

There is always the mystery that lingers beneath the wave, — the swift, bounding life one may not see and oft may not cajole, but which is ever present within the dusky depths. So much depends upon

the humour of the quarry, the time of day, the fitful breeze, and the passing cloud. The fly taken with such avidity yesterday may be useless to-day. The trout may rise, but refrain from fastening. The "bright fox" may be on, the east wind may blow, or thunder may be lurking in the air. One may arrive too late for the breakfast-hour, or too early for luncheon-time. Or having dined to repletion, the fish may refuse to be tempted until evening. Yet if one might win success with every cast, fishing must soon lose its charms, — *c'est être malheureux que d'être heureux toujours*. On the other hand, there is ever the possibility of the glittering reward; the mirage of the unexpected, through which, to him who waits, peradventure the coveted prize may come. If to-day be unpropitious, the morrow may hold a triumph in store. Or even now, the gathering clouds and rising breeze may provoke a change from frowns to smiles.

And if he who woos the capricious tenants be prone to moralizing, he may perceive in the steady lapse of the waters whose tide is never stayed, the swift, inexorable flight of time, and discern, in the floating bubbles which the surface bears, the transitoriness

14 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

of pleasure and the frailty of earthly hopes. But it is not always that occasion offers for moralizing on the angler's part. With the surface dimpled by the rising prey, there is little chance for attention to other than the all-engrossing subject at hand. And while one may view with æsthetic delight the play of shadow and sunlight upon the liquid floor, and follow the varying flow of the stream as it glides noiselessly past, or idles in some murmurous cove ere voicing its plaint to the shallows, it is with the trout, after all, that one is mostly concerned, and upon which one's constant attention must be centred. Then, when the monarch leaps to the lure, and the exhilaration of the capture comes, "doubt not but that angling will be so pleasant that it will prove to be, like virtue, a reward to itself."

Even pleasanter than following its banks is to enter the stream, when its nature will allow, and become a part with the ripple, the swirl of the eddy, and froth of the pool, — to be propelled by the current, and be embraced by its fond caress. But where the flux is of considerable volume, this means fishing down, and conflicts with the prevailing theory held by the modern English crafts-

men that one must angle up, to meet with the best success. Such is the practice of the "dry-fly" fisherman, with Halford as its most gifted exponent, who obtains the heaviest baskets and invariably the largest trout. His accomplishment is by far the more difficult, and, necessitating greater fatigue, is consequently accompanied with less pleasure during the hours of actual labour. But for weight and numbers, the dry-fly fisherman who stalks the clear English chalk-streams stands first among his brotherhood. And it is only necessary to watch the precision of his casts, his careful judgment, and the results of his handiwork, to recognise how much piscatory skill has advanced since the patriarch pronounced angling an art worthy the knowledge and practice of a wise and a serious man.

Still, however intent one may be upon the capture of the quarry, one may scarcely help but absorb and be influenced by the manifold attractions of Nature attendant upon the exercise of fly-fishing. Entering into intimate relationship with it is the study of entomology, and likewise of botany and ornithology. If the angler be of an observant temperament, the flora naturally arrests his

attention during his rambles; the birds address their songs to him; and to be proficient in this the highest attainment of the art, he must necessarily be familiar with the insect tribes which congregate at the water-side, and whose counterfeits constitute his wiles. Yet, though so many forms of aquatic insects exist, — nearly one half of insect-life breathing, feeding, and disporting in the water, — it is only those species that on emerging from their native element rise from the water, and those that, returning to it to perpetuate their evanescent race, hover over the current, which may be imitated with success by him who wields the wand. But the art of hooking the fish, the delicate cast and nicety of touch, come only by long experience, or more generally are born and not to be had for the mere acquiring, — like the unerring aim of the sportsman, or the artist's eye for form and colour. This fact was duly recognised by Walton, who would not undertake to make a man that was none to be an angler by a book.

The predecessor of all other sports, a brief reference to the development of angling, and to its literature previous to Walton's time, will serve to set forth his

position more clearly. Leaving out the question of who was the earliest angler with rod and line, a topic to which an extended thesis might be devoted, or the precise status of the sport among the old Greeks and Romans, it may be restated that Claudius Ælianus was first among the ancients to make mention of fly-fishing. And although at the risk of repeating a somewhat familiar passage, his account of the sport may not well be omitted.

In the fifteenth book of his History, written during the third century, he refers to the river Astræus where the Macedonians were accustomed to catch a fish which from its habits must have been closely related to the trout, by means of a fly called *hippurus*, whose size and markings resembled a hornet.

“When one of the fish sees the fly floating down towards him, he approaches, swimming gently under the water, fearing to move the surface lest his prey should be scared. Then, drawing nearer underneath, he sucks in the fly as a wolf snatches a sheep from the fold, or an eagle a goose from the farmyard, and having done so, disappears under the ripple.”

The natural fly, he adds, may not be

less, *The Compleat Angler* has added a finer grace, and to flowing waters imparted a sweeter sound. What Gilbert White accomplished within his chosen province, — the development of a closer attention to the beauties of outward Nature, — Walton had equally furthered more than a century previous in his favourite pursuit. That his idyllium was modelled to a considerable extent after the plan of *The Whole Art Of Hvsbandry* of Heresbachius, and of *The Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* of Dame Julyans, or Juliana Berners, or whoever its author may have been, is of little consequence: the key of angling pleasures was pitched at the meeting of “Piscator” and “Venator” on Tottenham Hill, on a certain fine pleasant fresh *May day*, in the morning, when hawthorns shed their fragrance and meads were pranked with flowers; and Walton fingered the reed.

To expect absolute originality in the treatment of any subject, even during olden days when the multiplicity of books had already become a vexation, were to seek for the philosopher's stone. Æons ago, it had been declared there was nothing new but what had been forgotten; and in order to learn the new, one must search the

old. Man had angled before Walton's time, and man had written of angling ; but none had alluded to it ; at least no prose-writer had referred to it with the unbounded love with which he has invested the theme in his sprightly dissertation. And not unlike *Selborne*, its immortality is largely due to its simple style and freshness. In both of these pastorals there is distilled the fragrance of peace and contentment, as from some golden censer. Both savour of " Art and Honesty, two things now strangers with many authors ; " and in the writing of each, a recreation was " made of a recreation."

No sport embraces so extensive a literature or has been so enthusiastically considered as that which descants upon the

"dancing cork and bending reed,"

or which treats of the fascinations accompanying the poetic pastime of the fly-fisher. This intense love for angling, common alike to young and old when enthusiasm has once been kindled, is due not only to the restful scenes amid which it is usually practised, but to its being generally formed during early youth. Nor is it to be wondered at that its devotees should regard it with such tender

12 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

reverence. Beyond all other recreations it is the most idyllic, if one but select the trout for a guide. He is the certain index, the infallible cicerone to lovely scenery. With every bend and reach of his fluvial highway he opens fresh vistas of beauty,—himself as pure and undefiled as the element wherein he roves. All the surroundings of the trout-stream invite to a restful frame of mind,—the minstrelsy of birds, the cool rush of the rapid, the wild flora, the myriad insect life that hovers above the current, the peace of great woods through which the streamlet flows, its soothing voice and dreamy, somnolent song. To the sport, moreover, is invariably added the component of uncertainty which imparts an increased zest to any pleasure. Fish are proverbially fickle—creatures of the moment and the hour : —

“ For there are times in which they will not bite,
But do forbear, and from their food refrain ;
And days there are wherein they more delight
To labour for the same, and bite amain.”

There is always the mystery that lingers beneath the wave, — the swift, bounding life one may not see and oft may not cajole, but which is ever present within the dusky depths. So much depends upon

the humour of the quarry, the time of day, the fitful breeze, and the passing cloud. The fly taken with such avidity yesterday may be useless to-day. The trout may rise, but refrain from fastening. The "bright fox" may be on, the east wind may blow, or thunder may be lurking in the air. One may arrive too late for the breakfast-hour, or too early for luncheon-time. Or having dined to repletion, the fish may refuse to be tempted until evening. Yet if one might win success with every cast, fishing must soon lose its charms, — *c'est être mal-heureux que d'être heureux toujours*. On the other hand, there is ever the possibility of the glittering reward; the mirage of the unexpected, through which, to him who waits, peradventure the coveted prize may come. If to-day be unpropitious, the morrow may hold a triumph in store. Or even now, the gathering clouds and rising breeze may provoke a change from frowns to smiles.

And if he who woos the capricious tenants be prone to moralizing, he may perceive in the steady lapse of the waters whose tide is never stayed, the swift, inexorable flight of time, and discern, in the floating bubbles which the surface bears, the transitoriness

22 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

fly-fishing is perhaps the most charming of all.¹

Among other noted monographs previous to Walton's, and subsequent to Dame Julyans' treatise, is Leonard Mascall's, *A Booke Of Fishing With Hooke & Line*, 1590, largely compiled from the latter; Gervaise Markham's, *The English Husbandman*, 1635, a prose version of Dennys' poem; and Thomas Barker's *The Art Of Angling*, 1651, with its numerous recipes for cooking fish. Of these and many others, together with the immense volume of contributions that has since flowed from the votaries of the craft, *The Compleat Angler*

¹ "Go, take thine angle, and with practiced line,
Light as the gossamer the current sweep;
And if thou failest in the calm still deep,
In the rough eddy may a prize be thine.
Say thou 'rt unlucky where the sunbeams shine;
Beneath the shadow where the waters creep,
Perchance the monarch of the brook shall leap —
For fate is ever better than design.
Still persevere; the giddiest breeze that blows
For thee may blow with fame and fortune rife;
Be prosperous — and what reck if it arose
Out of some pebble with the stream at strife,
Or that the light wind dallied with the boughs?
Thou art successful; — such is human life."

remains the sparkling well-spring and fountain-head. It has been only one Richard Franck, or "Philanthropus," as he pompously termed himself, who has accused the writer of "stuffing his book — his indigested octavo — with morals from Dubravius and others, and bringing himself under the common calamity of a plagiarist." To this it may be said that while Walton unquestionably did compile portions of his treatise from numerous other authors, it is no less distinctively his own. His coinage is fresh; his cowslip meadows and ladysmocks, his atmosphere of rusticity and loving-kindness belong to him alone. It is plagiarist to borrow, if we accept the dictum of Milton, only where the borrowing is not bettered by the borrower. One needs merely to glance at the censor's bombastic pages to turn to the author he asperses with an increased sense of pleasure, and assign to the detractor his proper station as a sour and ill-complexioned judge.

The little *editio princeps* published in 1653, with its quaint dolphin titlepage, and vignettes of fishes and inverted Angler's Song, has grown through subsequent additions and innumerable latter-day illustrations, memoirs, prefaces, biographies,

24 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

eulogiums, and notes, to a portly tome, — like a well-filled creel at the close of the day's sport. In these modern editions it may no longer be carried in one's pocket to the water-side, as its author no doubt would have had it, — to be perused when the "sweet day" proved too cool, or calm, or bright, and the fish were not in a responsive mood.

That Walton was a thoroughly accomplished angler, one may question when, considering the relative scarcity of fishermen, in his time, and therefore the lesser education of the fish compared with the present day, he tells Venator the Sun is got so high and shines so clear he will not undertake the catching of a *Trout* till evening. Here was precisely the opportunity for him to display his art were he possessed of "rare preexcellencie and beyond the common reach." Even those who are not proficient may beguile the trout with more or less success during the evening rise; but with the sun shining upon a clear stream the skilled artist alone may entice him from his fastness. An accomplished fly-fisher Walton certainly was not, however versed he may have been, practically or theoretically, in the subtleties of baits and bottom

fishing. But an expert fly-fisher — a wizard of the art, to whom the wary trout will come at call — is one thing ; an inviting writer on the subject, sufficiently conversant with it to speak with authority, is quite another matter. The two qualities are rarely combined ; and one may well spare Walton in the former respect, in view of the idealism with which he has invested his theme ; turning to his friend Charles Cotton for the elaboration of the higher mysteries of the science as practised at the time.

The topography of Walton's country, and the course and characteristics of its streams are likewise described much more in detail by the latter in his " Instructions How To Angle For A Trout Or Grayling In A Clear Stream," written as a supplement to the fifth edition of the *Angler* at the request of its author. Apart from the dialogue between Piscator and Viator which deals with generalities, and paves the way by easy stages to the banks of the Wye, the Derwent, the Trent, and the Dove, Cotton's treatise relating to fly-fishing is comparatively brief. His discourse on the subject proper shows him to have been an all-round angler of no mean ability, if not a conjuror with the fly as well. Despite

his accomplishments as an author, a translator, and a fly-fisher, he is extremely modest, fashioning his dialogue much after the style of Walton, whom he terms his "father" and credits with understanding "as much about angling as any man in England." It is from Wotton, the mutual friend of both worthies, that we know Walton as a bottom-fisher; for he it is who is referred to in the spirited lyric by the former, entitled "On a Bank as I sate a Fishing":—

"This day dame Nature seem'd in love;
The lusty sap began to move;
Fresh juice did stir th' embracing vines;
And birds had drawn their valentines.

"The jealous trout that low did lie
Rose at a well-dissembled fly;
There stood my *friend*, with patient skill
Attending of his trembling quill."

It will be remembered also that Walton's directions to his scholar for fly-making were not his own, but were given to him by "an ingenious brother of the angle, an honest man and a most excellent fly-fisher." This was none other than Thomas Barker, whose skill with the rod is clearly demonstrated by the passage on night-fishing for trout in the volume already alluded to. Walton's own

description of the night side of the sport, whether prompted or not by his predecessor angler-*chef*, from whom he quotes freely respecting the making and angling with a *flye* for a *Trout*, is one of his most salient passages. It has all the light and shade and spirit of an etching by Wairotter.

“You are to know,” he says, “there is night as well as day fishing for a Trout; and that in the night the best Trouts come out of their holds. And the manner of taking them is on the top of the water with a great lob or garden worm, or rather two, which you are to fish with in a stream where the waters run somewhat quietly, for in a stream the bait will not be so well discerned. I say in a quiet or dead place, near to some swift, there draw your bait over the top of the water, to and fro, and if there be a good Trout in the hole, he will take it, especially if the night be dark, for then he is bold, and lies near the top of the water, watching the motion of any frog or water-rat, or mouse, that swims betwixt him and the sky; these he hunts after if he sees the water but wrinkle or move in one of these dead holes, where these great old Trouts usually lie, near to their holds; for you are to note, that the great old Trout is

both subtle and fearful, and lies close all day, and does not usually stir out of his hold, but lies in it as close in the day as the timorous hare does in her form ; for the chief feeding of either is seldom in the day, but usually in the night, and then the great Trout feeds very boldly."

Barker, it may be stated, before setting out for the river "to provide his lord a good dish of Trouts against the next morning by sixe of the clock," went to the door "to see how the wanes of the aire were like to prove." Arriving at the river where it proved very dark, he "fell to angle," much as Walton describes, except that as "the night began to alter and grow somewhat lighter," he employed, besides the worm, a white palmer, a red palmer, and a black palmer fly, made on a large hook, with excellent results. "These three flies with the help of the lobworm," he continues, "serve to angle all the year for the night, the white flye for darkness, the red flye in medio, and the black flye for lightness. This is the true experience for Angling in the night, which is the surest angling of all *and killeth the greatest Trouts.* Your lines may be strong, but must not be longer than your rod." Thomas Barker, accordingly, appears

to have been the first author who makes mention of trout-fishing at night by means of the fly.

And while his directions may not be entirely such as the modern angler would put into practice, they are nevertheless correct on the whole. Night-fishing, as he justly observes, is the most deadly form of angling, on certain streams, during latter June, July, August, and late into the autumn months. Then, on favourable nights, the largest and most wary fish, which the wiles of the angler are powerless to lure by day, often take the fly, much as old Joseph Blagrave speaks of in his *Epitome of the Art of Husbandry* — “coming boldly to the Bait as if it were a Mastive-dog at a Bear !” To meet with success, there may be no moon, or it had need be obscured by clouds, — a fact well known to the latter writer. Neither in all waters will trout rise to the fly at night, the rise being dependent on the prevalence or absence of nocturnal insects. Even during the greatest darkness, fish seem endowed with remarkable keenness of vision ; in using three flies of different colours but of the same size, they will take a red one one night, a yellow one another, and a white one another, almost exclusively ; inde-

pendently of the position of the flies on the casting-line. In considering this discrimination of colours—for colour discrimination during the darkness certainly does exist on the part of the fish—it should be remembered that they look up towards the sky through a transparent medium; and no doubt red looks black to them, yellow perhaps a shade lighter, while white is probably recognisable for its true colour.

Night-fishing, however, which might have claimed a chapter on Walton's part, is only alluded to by him in the passage cited; the old author stating that though it is a choice way of angling, he had not oft used it, because it is void of the pleasures the summer day affords. Besides, one may readily fancy that after an outing on the Lea and the Dove, he would prefer to the society of the bats and solitude of the stars, the barley-wine and bodily comforts awaiting him and his companions at the Thatched House or other favourite hostelrie. One may also picture him meditating over some delectable author—Marlowe, Du Bartas, Herbert, or Donne—ere surrendering himself to the lavender-scented sheets of the inn; or conning perchance some chapter of Pliny or Aristotle to turn over in his dreams.

These ancient writers, together with Josephus, Ælianus, Ausonius, Rondeletius, Dubravius, Gesner, Aldrovandus, and others with equally facile imaginations, furnish him with many a quaint and striking paragraph on natural phenomena and ichthyological lore.

It is amusing, for example, to hear him tell, with a perfectly sober face, of a river in Arabia of which all sheep that drink have their wool turned to a vermillion colour ; of other waters which being drunk cause madness, some drunkenness, and some laughter to death ; of a river in Judea mentioned by Josephus, — “ that learned Jew,” — which runs swiftly during week-days but stands still on Sunday. Many of his fish-stories, likewise, which he tells without a twinkle in his eye, are delicious ; as his account of a species of trout, termed Fordidge trout, that are never caught by angling, and subsist on water alone ; of some fish having no mouths, but nourishing themselves and taking breath by the “ porousness of their gills, man knows not how ; ” of the mighty Luce or Pike, some of which are bred by generation and some not, — the latter, being generated by a weed called pickerel-weed, “ with the aid of

the sun's heat in some particular months, and some ponds apted for it by nature, do become Pikes."

The umber, grayling, or flower-fish, as "St. Ambrose, the glorious Bishop of Milan," termed him, gave him no little concern; and he would fain believe that he feeds on gold, or at any rate on water-thyme, "and smells of it on his first taking out of the water; and they may think so with as good a reason as we do that our Smelts smell like violets at their being first caught, which I believe is a truth." Singularly, Walton has not placed the chub or chavender in his black-list with the pike and otter, — one of the greatest enemies of the trout, who greedily devours the spawn and smaller fry, and well merits his French appellative, *un vilain*.

He tells, too, of the "adulterous" Sargus, as gross an offender as Oppian's "Wrasse," and eulogizes the "chaste" Mullet and "constant" Cantharus, as Herbert might hymn the delights of religion. The water-wolf, water-tiger, Luce, or Pike, which he terms a solitary, melancholy, and bold Fish, naturally supplies him with many an embroidery. Leaning on the *Alpenstock* of the Zürich naturalist who out-Plinys Pliny

in his natural-history extravaganzas, he props up his pike and frog stories until he comes to place credence in them himself. It is only Gesner's stupendous bream fantasia, which a Burton might search the olden authors through and through to equal, that proves almost too large for him to swallow; though he nibbles eagerly at the bait, leaving one uncertain whether he has really gorged it or not. Yet is not a fish-story the prerogative of the Angler, if only in revenge for the big fish who is prone to evade the landing-net and preach the sermon of *Vanitas vanitatum*? It is this very quaintness and homely simplicity, joined to the author's abiding love for Nature which imparts to *The Compleat Angler* its never-fading charm. As well eliminate Fidessa from the *Fairie Queene*, as the frog and mighty Luce from Walton's silvern streams. He is content to accept things as he finds them chronicled by Gesner and other "great and industrious searchers into the secrets of Nature," without troubling himself whether they are absolutely worthy of credence or not. This spirit is the thyme and frankincense of his canticle. There are no wrangling and disturbing arguments in his dissertation,

which ripples as softly as his beloved Stafford brooks, where trout and grayling dart, and May-flies revel above the surface of the Dove. Why dispute and jostle, with the laverock and throistle warbling overhead, and the rivulet murmuring its soothing lullaby? To Walton, during the fishing-season at least, the world was centred at the water-side; and what with pretty milkmaids and hostesses, and the allurements of the sport itself, he was more content than Omar, and his joys as unfailing as those set forth in the carol of Coridon.

Nevertheless, on reading some of his recipes for cooking fish, one marvels how it was possible for him to remain in a contented frame of mind, if he partook of the dishes himself. The young stomach of Venator who drank in his master's mellilloquent discourse with such unalloyed delight, perhaps might have digested without a nightmare some of the singular amalgams his instructor prescribes as too good for any but anglers or very honest men. Walton himself, in his advanced years, certainly could never have eaten them save by proxy, and have lived to complete the *Angler*. Venator, therefore, must have pulled his master's fishes from the fire.

.

And inasmuch as the latter has furnished no portrait of his attentive scholar, we must figure him as he is depicted at the breakfast-table by Stothard, — a youth of the willowy type with great possibilities for the play of knife and fork, and doubtless somewhat of a gourmand instead of a gourmet ; to whom after his prolonged exercise in the open air, no dish was impossible. What would Grimod de la Reyniere have thought of the culinary *potpourri* to which Walton would subject the pike, whose greatest crime was his love for frogs and fondness for goslings ? — first distending his liver with thyme, sweet marjoram, winter-savory, pickled oysters, anchovies, a pound of butter, and a blade or two of mace ; then stuffing him with this compound, ere roasting, and basting him with claret wine, anchovies and butter ; and finally adding the juice of three or four oranges, and two whole cloves of garlic to the sauce ! No wonder, having survived such a dish, Venator quotes the “devout Lessius,” and exclaims to his master when “falling to breakfast” beneath the sycamore tree, that his stomach was “excellent good.” Walton’s recipe for the cooking of a carp would call for still greater monastic capacities of digestion, — in strik-

ing contrast to Savarin's trout, "fetched from streams that murmur far from the capital;" and which, "fried in the very finest olive oil you have and served with slices of lemon, are worthy of a cardinal." That Walton, like Barker, plumed himself on his culinary skill, would seem apparent from the eulogium of "Peter," who congratulates his brother-angler on being "a Scholer to such a Master; a Master who knowes as much both of the nature and breeding of fish as any man; and can also tell him as well how to catch and cook them, from the *Minow* to the *Sammon*, as any that I ever met withall."

Of baits for fishing, he contributes a list that would hopelessly puzzle the modern amateur, — to say nothing of the time and labour it would require to procure and care for them. For angling during Walton's reign was not only a recreation, as he would have us suppose, but a serious, all-absorbing business, demanding as much attention as the fluctuations of the Stock-Exchange. The exact hour of day to lie in wait for a particular species, the precise size of hook, the shade of the angler's clothes, and length and material of rod and float, were all matters of the gravest import; to neglect

any of the minutiae of which were to imperil one's chances for success with even such plebeian subjects as the dace, the bleak, and the loach. As for the patricians of the water, the "well-governed angler" must think thrice ere deciding whether to employ the fly, the lobworm, the brandling, or the minnow; or if he must needs quote Herbert, or attune himself to the livelier strains of Wotton on betaking himself to the haven of the stream.

Moreover, in addition to the unbounded store of live and artificial lures of the olden school, there are the various scents for baits, and pastes and unguents "for the certain taking of divers kinds of fish," with whose mysteries the accomplished angler was supposed to be familiar.¹ Of these, Walton mentions the oil of ivy-berries as incorporating a scent to worms attractive enough to force any fish within the smell of them to bite; the oil drawn out of polypody of the oak mixed with turpentine and hive-honey; a bait anointed with the thigh-bone of a heron; camphor put with moss into

¹ Attention has been called by the writer to the efficacy of scented bait in the sketch on trout-fishing entitled "A Shadow Upon The Pool," in a previous volume, — *In Gold and Silver*.

the worm-bag ; and several oils of a strong smell which he " has been told of, and to be excellent to tempt fish to bite, of which he could say much." True, on the whole, he fights somewhat shy of scented baits ; and on this topic his voice no longer rings with authority, as it does when he expatiates upon the beauties of the meads or the budding charms of Maudlin. " Not but that I think that fishes both smell and hear," he goes on to say, Roger Ascham-wise ; " but there is a mysterious knack, which, though it be much easier than the Philosophers-Stone, yet is not attainable by common capacities, or else lies locked up in the braine or brest of some chimical men, that, like the *Rosicrutions*, yet will not reveal it." For the full elaboration of the subject those who may be interested should turn to the chapter of *The Angler's Vade Mecum*, on " Ointments to Allure Fish to the Bait," an excellent cotemporary treatise on angling, published by Walton's successor, James Chetham, in 1681.

Still, at times, Walton is epigrammatic with respect to baits. " The dew-worm for great Trouts, and the brandling for the lesse ! " he declares, and what could be easier sailing ? But these simple directions

were manifestly intended to hook Venator during the earlier stages of the game, the more readily to entice him to the water-side ; just as Coridon's song with its catching refrain was designed to gloze over the fatigues and disappointments accompanying the sport, and entrap fresh victims to the thrall of *Piscis*. For it must surely have been noticed by the most unobservant reader that all reference to the innumerable evils attendant on angling have been carefully excluded by its expounder-in-chief ; as, for instance, the abnormally early hours its practice calls for, the neglect of family obligations and business duties it necessarily incites, the irregularity of the luncheon hour, the constant danger from exposure to rains and fogs, the abnormal appetite and thirst it engenders, and, finally, the gross prevarication the sport inevitably leads to.

This latter feature, above all, is most cunningly dealt with by the Master-Craftsman, who, instead of acknowledging the vice, and endeavouring to explain it away, or boldly denouncing it with the view of effecting a remedy, merely refers the more frequently to "the Honest Art of Angling," or to anglers as "very honest men ;" which reminds one of the oft-repeated *très grande et*

fort honneste dame of Brantôme, who knew a pretty woman when he saw her ; but, like a latter-day French philosopher, considered virtue a sad thing, because it left no souvenirs. So persistently has Walton iterated honesty as a cardinal virtue and concomitant of the angler, that the unsuspecting reader might well suppose it were impossible to be numbered among the elect unless he made a religious duty of going a-fishing. The countless minor evils of the sport — from the vexations of insect pests and blinding reflection of the sun on the water, to the angler's constant disappointments and the bickerings and jealousies of the votaries of the craft themselves — are equally passed over by the suave Master of the Line. At the most, apparently forgetting himself for the moment, he mildly asperses the east wind, or confesses to a brief imprisonment underneath a beech-tree to escape a drenching from the shower, when no longer he might

“ — tempt that water-wolf, the pike,
 With rav'ning tooth his prey to strike,
 Or with the tender moss-worm tried
 Win the nice trout's speckled pride ;
 Or on the carp, whose wary eye
 Admits no vulgar tackle nigh,

Essay his art's supreme address,
And beat the fox in shere finesse."

No one will regret this *contretemps*, however, inasmuch as it furnished him with his charming description of the Echo, and idyl of the brookside,—the companion-piece to his odes to the lark and nightingale.

But as there is no pleasure without alloy, and all joys have their price here below, even Walton did not escape the irremeable fate of mankind. The lark might sing, and trout might leap; the May-flies dance, and the waters whisper "peace;" but there still remained the greatest of all *bêtes noires* for him,—an enemy more ravenous than the Luce, more blighting than Æolus' rudest blast. Amid all the allurements of his *campus deliciarum*, like some fabled monster demanding sacrifice, there lay in wait the bane of all Brothers of the Angle,—the otter, who "smells a fish forty furlongs off him," and whose cruel tushes were ever whetted for carnage. Fortunately, Venator, while wending his way for his morning's draught at the Thatched House ere he became a disciple of the rod and line, chanced to appear upon the scene; and with his pack of otter-dogs in full cry, came to the rescue

42 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

of the neighbouring waters. The otter disposed of, the stream again glides on with its accustomed smoothness, and the Idyllist resumes his silver strain. How sweet the water-lilies smell, and how gaily the lady-smocks and culverkeys troop along his meads! With what a rapturous burst of song the lark ascends the fields of air, and the birds of the adjoining grove bid welcome to the spring! How fragrant the scents from honeysuckle hedges and cowslip banks; and how merrily, too, the milk-maid sings! And with what *allegresse* Basse and Marlowe, Chalkhill and Dennys, Herbert and Donne join with one accord in the refrain, —

“Then care away,
And wend along with me!”

But angling, alas, has changed since the patriarch watched his float, and felt the pluck of roach and barbel, or thrilled to the rush of trout and grayling. With improved tackle and new methods of catching fish, together with the constantly increasing horde of anglers, the nobler species are not only becoming scarcer, but year by year more wary. The science of pisciculture, to be sure, has tended to maintain the supply

to a certain degree ; at the best, however, the capture of the *salmonidæ* has now become one of the most expensive of recreations. Good trout and salmon streams, or desirable portions of them, are leased at enormous rentals, no crop of the agricultor or land-owner yielding richer returns ; while successful fishing, except in preserved streams or in regions far remote, is becoming more and more difficult to obtain, and demands increasing skill on the part of its devotees. One marvels what Walton would think of the modern split bamboo, the multiplying reel, and the triumphs of the nineteenth-century fly-maker. And one can also fancy his look of surprise could he turn the pages of Stewart's *Practical Angler*, Francis Francis' *Book On Angling*, or Halford's *Dry Fly Fishing*. Naturally, unless one be curious to experiment with baits, the modern votary will find little of practical advantage to be gained from the olden treatises of the gentle dysporte ; in which respect *The Compleat Angler* forms no exception. Yet while rivulets tinkle and springtides dawn, it still remains one of the volumes that age cannot wither nor time deflower, — the book of the running brooks and classic of the water-side. And even now, if the

44 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

angler's purse permit, he might well imitate the example of William Combe of Henley, cited by Dibdin, who, to provide against a rainy hour on the Thames, was accustomed to carry a first edition of the *Angler* in one pocket, and a copy of the *editio princeps* of the *Hesperides* in another. At all events, one may at least convey Walton's innocent pleasantries and unfailing good-humour to the water-side, and thus extract a keener enjoyment from the manifold delights of Nature, and the practice of the Sport itself.

GILBERT WHITE'S PASTORAL.

GILBERT WHITE'S PASTORAL.

Queruntur in silvis aves.

HORACE: *Epode* II.

Thou shalt see the field-mouse peep
Meagre from its celled sleep ;
And the snake all winter-thin
Cast on sunny bank its skin ;
Freckled nest-eggs thou shalt see
Hatching in the hawthorn tree,
When the hen-bird's wing doth rest
Quiet on her mossy nest ;
Then the hurry and alarm
When the beehive casts its swarm ;
Acorns ripe down-pattering
While the Autumn breezes sing.

KEATS: *Fancy*.

FEW books of comparatively recent times have obtained greater recognition than the volume presented to the world under the familiar title, *The Natural History Of Selborne*. To very many who are unacquainted with it, this highly interesting register is a synonym for all that is fresh

and lovely in Nature, — a bucolic and idyl of the country-side ; the peer of the works of the Walden recluse and those of the prose-poet of the Wiltshire Downs. So often is Gilbert White referred to with some such import that it may be seriously questioned whether he is read as largely as we suppose, and whether the verdict respecting his painstaking chronicle, expressed years ago and since persistently reiterated, has not been tacitly accepted without personal knowledge on the part of many by whom it is so highly extolled. Or, on the other hand, White may be known to the many, and Thoreau and Jefferies to the relatively few. His name is a stock-in-trade with reviewers ; but while so often referred to, he is rarely quoted. To the majority of those who do not know him personally, a perusal of the volume, it is not improbable, would prove somewhat of a disappointment. For despite the praise it has received and justly merits, it is a book unlikely to please the average reader, — the less so if he is not an ardent ornithologist or zoölogist. Embracing mineralogy, zoölogy, meteorology, ornithology, entomology, and botany, with constant reference to ætiology, it may be termed a cyclopædia of English natural his-

tory, presented in epistolary form. It is the exhaustively compressed report of a statistician, the monograph of a life of studious privacy led in a retired parish of Hampshire amid surroundings most conducive to the writer's favourite pursuit. And though Selborne is but sixty miles removed from London and is readily accessible to-day, during White's time, if we may judge from the letter to his friend Thomas Pennant, it must have been attained with difficulty and even danger through the rocky hollow defiles, abounding in rare *filices* and echoes, but causing timid horsemen to shudder as they rode along them.

Selborne is the result of an enthusiast's observations for a period of more than two-score years ; and probably in no one volume of equal size has such an amount of exact scrutiny been brought to bear, or been more lucidly presented. It offers no pretence to florid diction, nor does it seek to amuse for the sake of mere diversion. It has its plain story to relate ; and this it does clearly, concisely, and instructively. Limpidity and simplicity are its grace ; and one will recollect, as illustrative of this trait, the author's complaint of some of the old poets who laboured as much to introduce two

chiming words as a butcher does to drag an ox to be slaughtered. His naturalness and absence of euphuism are only surpassed by his modesty when he adverts to his observations. No one, indeed, would have been more surprised at the great and increasing popularity of his work than the learned author himself, who died four years after its publication.

It is true, so far as natural beauties are concerned, that his landscape contains no running brooks or purling streams, like Walton's. But couched amid quiet coverts and exquisite woodland scenery, it is equally serene and exempt from public haunt. And instead of the tuneful lapse of waters, he gives us, as romantic adjuncts, the springing curves of chalk-hills, the flickering shade of beechen groves, the placid repose of neighbouring meres which reflect the flight of his favourite *hirundines*, and the fresh dewy exhalations of his beloved ferny lanes. Those who wish for the bird's song and habits, largely independent of the emotions they excite, will find them most faithfully delineated in its pages ; together with a most accurate account of the fauna of the district, and much relating to its history and phenomena. The author, a country vicar,

was a man of simple tastes, the possessor of a rare investigating mind, and an intense fondness for birds and animals. His observations, as is well known, are set forth in discursive form, as letters to his friends Thomas Pennant, Esq., and the Honourable Daines Barrington. Among the principal localities of his explorations referred to, are Wolmer Forest and Pond, Short and Long Lythe, Ayles Holt, Selborne Hanger and High Wood, the ruined foundations of the priory, his own garden, and the adjacent sheep-walks, downs, bogs, heaths, lanes, woodlands, and champaign-fields.

The conciseness of his style and precision of touch are evident in his first letter, descriptive of the parish and its surroundings, — a region, owing to the abrupt and uneven nature of the land, and its numerous woods and hills, that was especially frequented by birds. This one parish was his curriculum ; by far the major portion of his studies having been pursued within its immediate confines and close to his own home. *Qui ubique est, nunquam est*, was his motto.

In a day, from his windows and his garden, he could discern more of the ways of living creatures than befalls the lot of the ordinary person during a lifetime. "It is," he says,

"in zoölogy as it is in botany : all Nature is so full that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined. . . . Men that undertake only one district," he adds two years later, "are much more likely to advance natural knowledge than those that grasp at more than they can possibly be acquainted with : every kingdom, every province, should have its own monographer."

Strictly speaking, Gilbert White was not a poet or an idyllist, but rather an observer and investigator, with a strong trend toward science in its less arid and technical forms. And yet he possesses an unquestionable charm of his own, apart from that of a mere scientific recorder,—if the reader be but sympathetic and responsive to the spell. Constantly he is surrounded by country sights and sounds, a cloud of birds ever fluttering round his head, and crickets chirping at his feet. Leisurely he moves among them, taking notes by the way ; never tiring one with long rambles or dissertations ; and while quoting the Latin classists frequently, always quoting them pertinently, his frequent epigraph and citation forming a pleasing echo to the text.

We have no portrait of Gilbert White, to

see the outward man as he existed a century ago ; and so one may fancy him with knee-breeches and buckles rambling among flowery footpaths, watching the white owls under the eaves of the church, or reclining *sub tegmine fagi* on some mossy cushion of the "Hanger." Or one may picture him looking on with complacent smile at the sports in the Plestor, and hobnobbing with the rude forefathers of the hamlet when he did not chance to be watching for hedgehogs or pondering intently the all-engrossing subject of the migratory birds. Fond of his books, he does not see Nature through them, but takes his views at first hand ; his classicism being but a garnish to his observation. Nor, if somewhat scientific at times, can one ever term him tiresome.¹ An apt *raconteur*, he is well up in the folk-lore and antiquities of his parish. He is familiar with the peculiarities and

¹ He did not look for microbes everywhere. To many it would do much good to read this work if only with the object of getting rid of some of the spiders' webs that have been so industriously spun over the eyesight of those who would like to think for themselves.—RICHARD JEFFERIES, Preface to the Natural History of Selborne. London, Walter Scott, 1887.

composition of its soils, the various productions of the district ; and possesses a fund of interesting out-of-the-way information to constantly draw from with relation to his subject. He is always amiable withal, and free from prejudices ; his current is placid, like the flow of a quiet river. *Selborne*, furthermore, in many editions, is an unusually engaging volume to fondle, with its spirited illustrations of scenes referred to, and representations of much of the avifauna it describes. In the pulpit he must have been pleasing to listen to, judging from the directness and lucidness of his essays. Whether it was his wont to draw comparisons from natural objects in his sermons or to embroider his text with Latinity, has not been recorded. Of a surety the old male yew of the ancient churchyard, “which in the Spring sheds clouds of dust, and fills the atmosphere around with its farina,” must have furnished him with many an analogy, and figured as a symbol of immortality.

Yet although he may not be termed an idyllist, his book deserves to be classed among country idyls, if only for its reflex character in having fostered a closer acquaintanceship with outward Nature, —

a work that has paved the way to Jesse, Kingsley, Thoreau, Jefferies, Burroughs, and Gibson, and the choir that has hailed the sun upon the upland lawn. It has taught when and how to observe, and made us more responsive to a life that enters into intimate relationship with our own. It is as such that White deserves lasting recognition, apart from his valuable labours as a naturalist during his own generation.

Not that he was insensible to certain forms of outward beauty which address themselves to man's finer feelings, but that he was more intent upon his work of studying living creatures from the standpoint of a naturalist than considering them from the poet's point of view. Yet poetic passages are by no means unfrequent in his writings. "The Naturalist's Evening Walk," with its delightfully pastoral sentiment, speaks for itself, — its lines on the instinct that prompts the arrival and departure of the migrants among the feathered tribes being classic in their grace and beauty : —

"Amusive birds! say where your hid retreat
When the frost rages and the tempests beat ;
Whence your return by such nice instinct led,
When Spring, soft season, lifts her bloomy head ?


56 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

Such baffled searches mock man's prying pride,
The *God of Nature* is your secret guide! "

One remembers also his account of the felling of the Raven Tree, his appreciation of the shapely figured aspect of chalk-hills, the blackcap paraphrasing a passage from "As You Like It," and his scholastic call to the echo : —

"Tityre, tu patulæ recubans — — — —"

The scene of this echo, described in one of the most pleasing of the epistles, was in a depressed vale near the sleepy village where echoes abounded, and which gave back most agreeably, from a hop-kiln above the hollow cartway, the chorus of a pack of hounds, the clarion of the hunting-horn, a sonorous chime of bells, and the minstrelsy of birds. Numerous experiments were made by the naturalist with this echo, from which he discovered that moist air deadens and clogs the response, hot sunshine renders it thin and weak, and a ruffling wind quite defeats the whole. On quiet dewy evenings the air is most elastic, and perhaps the later the hour, the more so. He likewise tells how an echo may be constructed on one's grounds at little or no expense in many



instances ; it being only needful, when occasion calls for the erection of a stable or like structure, to erect it on the gentle declivity of a hill, with a little rising opposite to it, at a few hundred yards distance.

It was near here also, on an elevated portion of the Downs, where during hot summer days he met with an occurrence whose cause he was unable to trace,—a loud humming as of bees in the air, though not one insect was to be seen. This sound, he states, was to be heard distinctly the whole common through, from the Money-Dells to his avenue gate, so that one might suppose a large swarm of bees was in motion, and playing about over his head. Is not this most musical aerial melody which one sometimes hears in woods during clear midsummer days produced by the winnowing wings of myriads of midges engaged in the dance of rivalry and love ?

To revert to his relation towards Nature, this may perhaps be most fairly outlined by his own defined opinion respecting the study of botany : “ The standing objection to botany has always been that it is a pursuit that amuses the fancy and exercises the memory, without improving the mind

58 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

or advancing any real knowledge : and where the science is carried no farther than a mere systematic classification, the charge is but too true. But the botanist that is desirous of wiping off this aspersion should be by no means content with a list of names ; he should study plants philosophically, should investigate the laws of vegetation, should examine the powers and virtues of efficacious herbs, should promote their cultivation ; and graft the gardener, the planter, and the husbandman on the phytologist. Not that system is by any means to be thrown aside ; without system the field of Nature would be a pathless wilderness : but system should be subservient to, not the main object of pursuit." Thoreau also complained that modern botanical description approaches ever nearer to the dryness of an algebraic formula, as $x + y = a$ love-letter ; while the reader will remember Hulme's facetious reference to the professional botanist : —

“ And to himself he drew a bramble spray,
And in its study passed some hours away ;
Its setose stem and ternate leaves, the leaflets
 cuspidate,
The prickles small, and foliage so evenly serrate,

All seemed to point it out to be the *Rubus glandulosus*,
And not, as he at first had thought, the *Rubus fruticosus*."

No one may scan the text of *Selborne*, however cursorily, without being impressed by the author's attentive consideration of almost everything appertaining to out-of-door life. He has dealt with nearly every branch of natural history. The movements of living things, more especially, were his great delight, and he was overjoyed when any unfamiliar bird, animal, or insect chanced to appear. Besides his own persistent efforts, he seems to have had a posse of keepers and sharp-shooters at command, the year round, to collect birds for him, — with a troop of boys to climb the trees for eggs and birds' nests. Anticipating Darwin, he has devoted a chapter to earth-worms, wherein he refers to them as the great promoters of vegetation, concluding his remarks by saying a good monograph on the subject would open a large and new field of natural history. The migrants, especially, have never been more closely watched than he has watched them; the exact dates of their arrivals and departures having been recorded by him, with unflagging exactitude, for years. During the

winter he was also constantly studying the means of subsistence of birds, the greatest support of which he discovered in the infinite profusion of the *Lepidoptera ordo*, which is fastened to the twigs of trees and their trunks, to the pales and walls of gardens and buildings, and is found amid every cranny and cleft of rock or rubbish, and even in the ground itself.¹ It were difficult to point to any other instance where bird-life has been so graphically and succinctly summarised as in the eighty-fourth and eighty-fifth epistles of *Selborne*.

His method of observation is outlined by him in his twenty-ninth epistle: "For many months I carried a list in my pocket of the birds that were to be remarked on; and as I rode or walked about, I noted each day the continuance or omission of each bird's song; so that I am as sure of my facts as a man can be of any transaction whatsoever." In another epistle he observes that for more than forty years he has paid some attention to the ornithology of the district, without being able to exhaust the subject; new occurrences arising so long as any inquiries are kept alive, — an

¹ Letter LXI.

experience similar to that recorded by both Thoreau and Jefferies.

The *Naturalist's Calendar*, jointly kept by Gilbert White at Selborne, and William Markwick at Catsfield, Sussex, from the years 1768 to 1793, reveals at a glance his precise attention to detail,—the dates expressing the earliest and the latest times in which the circumstances noted were observed. It reads like an Eclogue of the seasons. Thus we are informed just when the red-breast, skylark, and missel-thrush, the yellow-hammer, green-finch, nightingale, and the rest of the winged harmonists begin their psalmody; when the wych-elm flowers and the death-watch beats; when the raven builds and the ivy casts its leaves; when the blue titmouse chirps and bees engage in battle with the drones; when frogs pipe and trouts begin to rise; when sheep yield their fleeces; when turkey-cocks strut and gobble, and field-cricket crink. We are apprised what time the pheasant crows, the brown wood-owl hoots, and the dragon-fly clashes his cymbals; when the may-bug booms; when the woodspurge and yellow pimpernel unfold their corollas, and the foxglove uplifts its purple spire; of the period of the yew-trees' blossoming; of the

florescence of the hound's-tongue, shepherd's-purse, ladysmock, and musk-wood crowfoot ; of the advent of the burnet-moth, wolf-fly, stag-beetle, and *Vespa vulgaris*. We are told when gnats play about, and insects swarm under sunny hedges, and the mole-cricket churs ; when the male fool's-orchis blossoms, and wild honeysuckles disburse their fragrance a second time ; when jackdaws return to churches, and the peacock-butterfly spreads his painted vanes ; of the date when bees swarm, and the spider shoots its silken floss, and the bat wheels his circuit against the twilight sky.

He announces what time the stone-curlew clamours and the ringdove coos ; of the first shadows cast by the wryneck, ring-ouzel, sedge-warbler, and fern-owl ; when the glow-worm lights her evening lamp, and the mushroom unfolds its snowy pileus ; when the bird's-nest orchis flowers, and songsters resume their vernal notes ; when the blackbird sits upon her eggs, and the harebell rings its chimes ; when the thistle-down floats, and the beech becomes a dream of gold. He signals the period when the rooks return to their nest-trees, and haws hang red on the thorn ; when the tortoise retires to his hibernaculum, and martins

and chaffinches congregate ; when swifts plume their southward flight, and greenfinches flock, and the last swallow flits over the crimsoning hill.

Other interesting records are also those of the summer birds of passage noted by the naturalist in the neighbourhood and ranged according to the order in which they appear ; a list of winter birds of passage ; and a register of insect-eaters that remain the year round. Of the former, he describes the middle willow-wren as having a sweet, plaintive voice, the blackcap a sweet, wild note, the redstart a somewhat agreeable song, and the lesser reed-sparrow as being a sweet polyglot, having the notes of many birds. The land-rail cries harshly, "*Crex ! crex !*" and the largest willow-wren *cantat voce stridula locustæ*. This last, he remarks, haunts only the tops of trees in high beechen woods, and makes a sibilous, grasshopper-like noise now and then, at short intervals, shivering a little with its wings when it sings.¹ The smallest uncrested

¹ With regard to the three willow-wrens which White enumerates, his fellow ornithologist, William Markwick, states that he has used his utmost endeavours to discover them, but without success.

64 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

willow-wren utters two sharp, piercing notes, so loud in hollow woods as to occasion an echo.

Among birds that have somewhat of a note or song, and yet may not be classed with the songsters proper, he specifies the grasshopper-lark who chirps all night from the middle of April to the end of July, and sounds close by, though he be a hundred yards distant; the marsh-titmouse who haunts great woods and utters two harsh, sharp notes; and the golden wren, whose crown glitters like burnished gold, that frequents the summits of high oaks and firs, its note as minute as its person. Of birds that sing as they fly, he mentions the wood-lark as singing suspended during hot summer nights all night long. Elsewhere he speaks of the sibilous, shivering noise made by the flycatcher in the tops of tall woods. The note of the whitethroat, which is continually repeated and often attended with odd gesticulations on the wing, seemed to him harsh and displeasing. The sedge-bird he describes as vocal during

No doubt, observes Frank Buckland, these three willow-wrens are mistaken for the chiff-chaff, wood-wren, and willow-wren, the wood-wren being very rare.

the greater part of the night, its notes being hurrying and imitative of several birds, — as the sparrow, swallow, and skylark. When it appears to be silent during darkness, the casting of a stone into its haunt amid the bushes causes it immediately to resume its song. The nightingale,

“ warbling at eve when all the woods are still,”
completes his list of nocturnal songsters.

A strange bird is the storm-cock or missel-bird, so called because he sings early in the spring, during blowing, showery weather. The grasshopper-lark or warbler, he frequently refers to, — a small, shy migrant, arriving with the willow-wren and departing with the flycatcher. He is a restless, uneasy bird, extremely difficult to detect, who skulks amid the bushes and whose notes strongly resemble those of the grasshopper or locust. A cunning ventriloquist, his whisper appeared close at hand to the observer, though at a hundred yards' distance, and when near his ear, seemed scarcely any louder than when a great way off. But the characteristics of the grasshopper-lark are by no means confined to England or the Hampshire lanes; for our native little yellow-winged sparrow is

also a most accomplished ventriloquist, and imitates very closely the stridulation of the grasshopper hosts amid the meadows and herbage he inhabits. Like the grasshopper-lark, he is extremely shy and evasive. Nesting upon the ground, and seldom revealing himself above his place of concealment, his song is so strongly imitative of the chirping of the *Grylliadæ* that the presence of the bird remains unsuspected except to the ornithologist, — a mere grace-note in the ceaseless orchestration of the midsummer fields.

Though the nightingale and blackcap were his favourite choirmasters, the cawing of rooks held a high place in his esteem. These, as they circled and dove with clamorous cries over the distant Selborne-down, in vast flocks just before the autumnal dusk, reminded him of the cry of a pack of hounds in hollow, echoing woods, or the rushing of wind in tall trees, or the tumbling of the tide upon a pebbly shore.¹ Owls, he states, for the most part, hoot in B flat, their notes being tried by a pitch-pipe, such as masters use for the tuning of a harpsichord. A subsequent experiment by a

¹ Letter CIII.

musical friend, however, having demonstrated that they hooted in three different keys, — in G flat or F sharp, in B flat, and A flat, — he is undecided whether these different notes proceed from different species, or only from various individuals. He did not believe the woodcock sometimes carried her young by means of her beak, as had been asserted by the naturalist Scopoli ; though the female *scolopax*, it is well known, does carry them with her claws, or closely pressed against her breast.

But, above all birds, the swallow appears to have been his favourite, — whether cleaving the azure of the sky, or feathering her plastic nest, or congregating around the village church-steeple preparatory to the southward flight. On the other hand, Procne and her volant wing was his especial vexation, — the one vane of his observations which was ever veering in incertitude. It was impossible for him to determine whether the *hirundines* migrated ; and he was always seeking proof to support his cherished theory of their hibernation during the chilly season. This he reverts to continually, with no more success than is expressed by the lament of Henry Vaughn : —

“ He that hath found some fledg’d bird’s nest may
know

At first sight if the bird be flown,
But what fair dell or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown.”

Agreeing with Linnæus and Kalm, many of the swallow kind, he maintained, do not leave in winter, but lay themselves up like insects and bats in a torpid state, and so await the dawn of spring. “ Do they not withdraw and slumber in some hiding-place? . . . Are not these late hatchings more in favour of hiding than migration?” are his constant queries. To solve this perplexing problem he repeatedly excavated the caves of the bank-martin, and examined places likely to afford concealment, without avail. This doubt was based upon the records of his journal for many years, showing that house-martins retired, to a bird, about the beginning of October, again frequently appearing during the first week of November; from which fact, together with other data concerning the swallow, he contends that two whole species of British *hirundines*, the swallow and house-martin, or at least many individuals of these two species, never leave the island, but remain

in a benumbed state throughout the winter months. His correspondent, Daines Barrington, held a similar opinion, believing the martins concealed themselves amid rocky fissures, or lurking-places in the earth, and the swallows buried themselves under water below the frost-line. Having noticed a belated brood of the latter, retiring nightly in mid-October to a dense, almost impenetrable covert of underwood beech, White concluded this may have subsequently been their hibernacle, and this colony at least never left the island during the winter.

“I have only to add,” he says, “that were the bushes, which cover some acres and are not my own property, to be grubbed and carefully examined, probably those late broods, and perhaps the whole aggregate body of the house-martins of this district might be found there, in different secret dormitories; and that, so far from withdrawing into warmer climes, it would appear that they never depart three hundred yards from the village.” The migration of birds was ever a fruitful source of speculation with the olden writers, and one will remember in this connection Robert Burton’s quaint reference to the coming and going of the winged tribes in his spirited “Digres-

sion Of Air,"¹ as well as Walton's allusion to the same subject.²

¹ I would find out, and, if I could, observe what becomes of swallows, storks, cranes, cuckoos, nightingales, redstarts, and many other kinds of singing-birds, water-fowls, hawks, etc. Some of them are only seen in Summer, some in Winter. In Winter not a bird is in *Muscovy* to be found, but at the Spring in an instant the woods and hedges are full of them, saith *Herbastein*: how comes it to pass? Do they sleep in Winter, like *Gesner's* Alpine mice; or do they lie hid (as *Olaus* affirms) *in the bottom of lakes and rivers*, spiritum continentes? *often so found by fishermen in Poland and Scandia, two together, mouth to mouth, wing to wing; and when the Spring comes they revive again, or if they be brought into a store, or to the fireside.* Or do they follow the sun; or lie they hid in caves, rocks and hollow trees, as most think? I conclude of them all, for my part, as *Munster* doth of cranes and storks: whence they come, whither they go, *incompertum adhuc*, as yet we know not. (The Anatomy of Melancholy.)

² It is well known that swallows and bats and wagtails which are called half-year birds, and not seen to fly in England for six months in a year, about Michaelmas leave us for a hotter climate; yet some of them that have been left behind their fellows have been found, many thousands at a time, in hollow trees, or clay caves, where they have been observed to live, and sleep out the whole Winter without meat. (The Compleat Angler.)

Concerning the migration of the swifts, which invariably departed before the middle of August, White seems to have had less doubt. The arrival of the swift he places ten or twelve days later than the arrival of the swallow, occurring on nearly the same date as the advent of the house-martin. The swallow, he observes, takes his bath by dipping into the water as he flies, and drinking, like bats, on the wing, from the surface of pools and streams. They feed their young on the wing and play in the air in amorous chase, as do also the sand and house-martins ; but so swiftly as not to be perceptible to indifferent eyes. Twittering through the ether and joyously singing in the sunshine, he justly terms the swallow " a delicate songster," in which respect he has the old Grecian feeling ; bearing out a previous remark that sounds do not always give us pleasure according to their sweetness and melody, nor do harsh sounds always displease, — it is the associations they promote, rather than the notes themselves, by which the hearer is often favourably influenced.

Of the varied minstrelsy of the insect and reptilian tribes, White has little to record, — a fact that is not surprising when one con-

siders the stillness of English fields and woods with regard to these voices as compared with our own. The strident chorus of our estival days and nights, when the air rings and pulsates with multisonous sound, is largely absent: — the dreamy choir of various leaf-crickets; the raucous, grating, monotonous brawl of the katydid and his clamorous relative, the green, oblong, leaf-winged katydid; the piercing, sibilant, long-drawn clarion of the harvest-fly; together with the shrill treble of the hylodes in early spring, and the sonorous basso of the great *Rana* who bays the midsummer moon. We could well spare the katydid, it is true, — perhaps the most discordant of all familiar insects, whose dissonant notes might be compared with those of the great lantern-fly of Guiana (*Fulgora laternaria*) — from its noise in the evening, which is said to resemble the sound of a cymbal, or razor-grinder when at work, appropriately termed “scare-sleep.” But with the katydid present, so reposeful a volume as *Selborne* could never have been composed, and the genial Hampshire curate must have become deaf long before his appointed time.

Though White does not mention the great green leaf-cricket, harshly vocal during

the autumnal twilight amid the oaken-spray, in company with the "crink-crink" of the cinereous cricket, — the cry of the field-cricket was, nevertheless, fraught to him with the most pleasing associations of rural life; while the low, dull, jarring note of the mole-cricket, uttered for a long time uninterruptedly, recalled to him the chattering of the fern-owl or goat-sucker. When mole-crickets fly, he observed, they move *cursu undoso*, rising and falling in curves like the field and house crickets, their cry commencing about the middle of April, and just at the close of day. "When house-crickets are out and running about a room in the night, if surprised by a candle they utter two or three shrill notes, as if it were a signal to their fellows that they may escape to their crannies and lurking-places to avoid danger. In families at such times," he continues, "they are like Pharoah's plague of frogs, — in their bedchambers, and upon their beds, and in their ovens, and in their kneeding-troughs."

With the phenomena of the weather, he was deeply interested, constantly watching his weather-glass and the signs of the sky, and keeping an account of the frosts and the rainfall as assiduously as he noted the

movements of the birds. His most trustworthy weather-prophet was his tortoise; when it walked elate and fed with great earnestness in the morning, rain always occurred before night. Woodcocks he reports as "remarkably listless against snowy foul weather," and sheep as "very intent on grazing against stormy wet evenings." Among the strange phenomena of the district were numerous small ponds on the sheep-downs and summits of chalk-hills which maintained a supply of water for flocks and herds during the most severe droughts, when small and even considerable valley-ponds became dry. This maintenance of supply in the hill-ponds, he attributes to the copious dews and frequent nocturnal fogs on the elevated downs. Referring to trees as alembics, he mentions an oak which during a misty day shed water so rapidly that the cartway stood in pools and the ruts ran with water, though the ground in general was dusty. A curious superstition was connected with a very old pollard ash-tree, termed a shrew-ash, formerly standing in the Plestor near the village church, of which he gives the following account: —

"A shrew-ash is an ash whose twigs or

branches, when gently applied to the limbs of cattle, will immediately relieve the pains which a beast suffers from the running of a shrew-mouse over the part affected ; for it is supposed that a shrew-mouse is of so baneful and deleterious a nature, that wherever it creeps over a beast, be it horse, cow, or sheep, the suffering animal is afflicted with cruel anguish, and threatened with the loss of the use of the limb. Against this accident, to which they are constantly liable, our provident forefathers always kept a shrew-ash at hand, which, when once medicated, would maintain its virtues forever. A shrew-ash was made thus : Into the body of the tree a deep hole was bored with an auger, and a poor devoted shrew-mouse was thrust in alive, and plugged in, no doubt, with several quaint incantations, long since forgotten. As the ceremonies necessary for such a consecration are no longer understood, all succession is at an end, and no such tree is known to subsist in the manor or hundred."

So late as the year 1776 there stood near the middle of the village a row of pollard ashes which when young and flexible had been severed and held open by wedges, into the apertures of which ruptured chil-

dren were pushed through, under the belief that they would thus be cured of their infirmity. If the parts of the tree, which were subsequently swathed up, coalesced, the afflicted person was healed ; but where the cleft continued to gape, the operation proved ineffectual.

Numerous were the superstitions connected with the ash in olden days, when man had more leisure to exercise the play of his imagination. When the oak came out before the ash, a wet summer was predicted. For invoking good luck, the ash-leaf is yet commonly employed in Cornwall, the ancient formula reading :

“ Even ash, I do thee pluck
Hoping thus to meet good luck ;
If no good luck I get from thee,
I shall wish thee on the tree ; ”

reminding one of the daisy, and “ he loves me, he loves me not.”

In the north of England the uses of the leaf were thus set forth : —

“ The even ash-leaf in my left hand,
The first man I meet shall be my husband ;
The even ash-leaf in my glove,
The first I meet shall be my love ;

The even ash-leaf in my breast,
 The first man I meet's whom I love best ;
 The even ash-leaf in my hand,
 The first I meet shall be my man ;
 Even ash, even ash, I pluck thee,
 This night my true love for to see," —

apparently a case in evidence of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

In Greece the ash, as well as the oak, was accounted a tree whence men had sprung ; while Culpepper, Gerard, and the ancient herbalists,—to say nothing of Pliny, Dioscorides, and the older school,—are full of the healing properties and virtues its various parts possess.

One of the most singular phenomena mentioned by the naturalist is his account of the bee-boy, surpassing the stories told by Butler, Huber, or any of the arch bee-masters who have etched the likeness of the honey-fly. It reads as extraordinary as the anecdotes of the ancient apiarists who believed the young were gathered from flowers, and the insects balanced themselves with pebbles against the high winds. *Sic vos non vobis mellificatis apes*,—not for yourselves did ye gather honey, O ye Selborne bees ! The lad in question, who was of weak mind, and dozed away his time during winter,

became aroused upon the advent of the flowery season, going eagerly in quest of his game in the fields and upon sunny banks. Passionately fond of honey, all kinds of bees and wasps, wherever found, became his prey; which he would seize, disarm of their stings, and feast on the nectar of their honey-bags. Stealthily entering a bee-garden, he would rap upon the hives, and so grasp the insects as they appeared. Often he would overturn the hives, like the proverbial bear, and store away quantities of his captives. When metheglin was being brewed, he would hover, vampire-like, about the tubs, craving a draught of what he termed bee-wine, making a droning sound with his lips the while, resembling the buzzing of bees. Except in his favourite pursuit, in which he was singularly cunning, he showed no manner of understanding, dying before he attained majority.¹

Thus intent upon studying birds, animals, insects, and phenomena, the Selborne curate passed a large portion of his time while writing his instructive monograph. Occupied by congenial pursuits, he cared little

¹ Letter LXIX.

for the applause of the world ; content in pleasant weather with observing natural objects, and on inclement days finding an inviting retreat in his great parlour, with the house-cricket, his parlour cat, and his classics. So retired was his life and so sequestered from the turmoil of the world by the boundaries of his native hills and lanes, that but little account has been obtained of his personality. But to those who know him on the printed page, he must always seem to have solved the problem of Content, his *hirundines* excepted ; and to have found and harboured, through the very fact of never having sought or attempted to claim her for his own, the elusive siren whose smile is coveted by all.

Not that life was entirely composed of sunshine to him, —

“ . . . nihil est ab omne parte beatum.”

He, too, had his periodical vexations and ruffling east-winds of the soul. The wasps annoyed him by destroying his fruits just as they were maturing, and forcing him to trap them with bird-lime. Honey-dews, at times, defaced the beauties of his garden, enveloping flower and shrub

with a viscous substance that became a receptacle for *aphides* and smother-flies. Sometimes the surrounding lanes became impassable with drifted snows, and cruel frosts cut down his fine Portugal laurels, bays, and laurustines, — stripping the ivies and hollies of their leaves. During the summer of 1783 alarming meteors, tremendous thunderstorms, and smoky fogs occurred ; the sun shedding a rust-coloured, ferruginous light on the ground and floors of rooms, causing the country-folk to look with superstitious awe at the red, lowering aspect of the sky. Again, a blue mist, smelling strongly of sulphur, hung along the sloping woods ; and hail-stones measuring three inches in girth shattered his windows, hand-glasses, and garden-lights.¹ The seeds of the *Parnassia* he sowed in the neighbouring bogs several times in vain ; his deafness incommoded him sadly ; and to the last of his days there remained the perplexing question whether the *hirundines* migrated or hibernated.

Re-reading *Selborne*, one comes to appreciate it the more, and to perceive in the letters of the learned Hampshire parson those qualities that one must ever cherish in

¹ Letter CIX., CX.

fond regard. Its fresh and simple style, its modest, unassuming grace cling to and permeate its leaves like the fragrance of the ferny lanes and shade of the beech-woods it leads to. To remember it is to enter a region of rest and quietude, with nothing more important than to watch the churn-owl's flight and hearken to the cricket's cry. And if read in the right mood, it will, after all, seem eminently deserving of being classed among rustic *idyllia*, and returned to the library shelves to be enshrined with Theocritus and "The Georgics."

**THE LANDSCAPE OF THOMAS
HARDY.**

THE LANDSCAPE OF THOMAS HARDY.¹

It is the landscape, not of dreams or of fancy, but of places far withdrawn, and hours selected from a thousand with a miracle of *finesse* . . . in no ordinary night or day, but as in faint light of eclipse, or in some brief interval of falling rain at daybreak, or through deep water.

WALTER PATER : *The Renaissance*.

HAD Thomas Hardy never lived and written, the home of his birth and its environment would still exercise an abiding spell upon all those who love rural England, and who, pre-eminently in the southern counties, find the attractions of summer and rural life perhaps more strongly emphasised than in even most of the many other favoured portions of Britain.

One must, nevertheless, thank Mr. Hardy as one would a sign-board that points out some unfamiliar but alluring way,

¹ The season of the year referred to is that of middle June.

for guiding one so minutely to Wessex in general, and Dorset in particular. The fact that the attraction previously existed just as it exists at present ; that then as now from Roman rampart and ancient castrum, from ivied chantry and undulating down, from graceful abbey and crumbling priory, there was a story to be told or elements of beauty to be fondly treasured, counts but little; — to Mr. Hardy belongs none the less the merit of the discovery. Without him there were no Valley of the Var, no Wellbridge, no Blackmoor Vale. At least, they would exist remote from alien eyes, to all intent and purpose familiar to the locality alone. He is, in truth, the romantic index of Dorset, as Jefferies is the poetic exponent of Wiltshire, and Gilbert White the expositor of Hants. Few who have written are as conversant with the history, topography, and physiognomy of their native land. One must equally search far and wide for one who knows a country-folk and ways appertaining to local rusticity so intimately as he, — most signally typified by that grotesque assemblage who with antique garb and Bœotian dialect, disport and moralise *Under The Greenwood Tree*. He feels and reflects the genius of country places much

as Charles Lamb felt the genius of the town ; and it is only on the comparatively rare occasions when he leaves his native byways that we find him less pleasing and less true to Nature. To be sure, the scenes and materials are ready in profusion to his hand. But these in a different guise exist elsewhere, awaiting another Hardy, or Tennyson, or Teniers, as the case may be, to give them shape and mould them into artistic and enduring form. Every district and hamlet has its story to be told, its poem to be sung, its picture to be painted. Only, the analyst and poet are not alway present, or the painter passes by and may not see.

And it is no less due to the genius of his intellection of outward Nature in her various phases of the seasons — the fitful mood of the landscape and monition of the fleeting hour — than to his wondrous dramatic art as portrayed in the passions that are enacted in a sequestered southern district, that his necromancy consists. Exclude his landscapes, the background on which his silhouettes are shadowed, and which with him become factors subservient and dominant in the life-dramas he has conceived and consummated, and at once an insidious force that is felt continuously were evanished

from the scene. The dairy and sheep-cote, the grain-field and farmstead, the period of seedtime and fulfilment of harvest,—all that appertains to the rural and pastoral life of a region remote enough to still preserve its archaic character, —are set forth with the picturesqueness and fidelity of Virgil and Détille. A less minute observer than Jefferies, of whose studies of the labourer and farm-life he frequently reminds us, less perceptive than Thoreau, who saw with a double power of vision, his is peculiarly the craft of drawing new symbols and meanings from Nature's many-sided aspects of atmosphere, and the subtle alchemy of the changing year, — meanings grim or buoyant, vague or lucid, mysterious or prophetic, such as an acutely impressible temperament might unconsciously feel, but that few have ever before expressed. Indeed, a sentence recording some traits of one of the chief actors in his recent tragedy of man's lust and woman's fall, may be accepted as autobiographic, applicable with equal force to its author and this noticeable characteristic of his work and method : " He grew away from old associations and saw something new in life and humanity. Secondly, he made acquaintance with phenomena ; . . .

the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon, winds in their different tempers, trees, waters, and mists, shades and silences, and the voices of inanimate things."

Without wandering too far from the subject, it might be added that in his views of life as presented in his own "*Comédie Humaine*," he believes with Balzac that "man is neither good nor bad ; he is born with instincts and aptitudes, but self-interest develops evil tendencies in him." The natural remedy, the latter maintains, is religion. Mr. Hardy, however, who can philosophise profoundly when he chooses, dismisses the question abruptly by the somewhat sententious, if not captious reply, that "a novel is an impression, not an argument, and there the matter must rest." And yet if we turn to a page of *A Laodicean*, we shall find a certain phase of his philosophy of life most axiomatically set forth : "With a disposition to be happy, it is neither this place nor the other that can render us the reverse. In short, each man's happiness depends upon himself and his ability for doing with little." And again, to the question, "What is wisdom really ?" he makes answer in the opening chapter of *Desperate*

Remedies: "A steady handling of any means to bring about any end necessary to happiness. Yet whether one's end be the usual end — a wealthy position in life — or no, the name of wisdom is never applied but to the means of that usual end." The general burden of his analysis concerning the tribulations of existence is expressed by him still more tersely, if less satisfactorily, in the four words explicative of the relentlessness of fate, — "it was to be ;" an echo of the refrain of the "Prologue In Heaven," *es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt*.

It matters not whether Egdon Heath is but a stretch of mournful moor, keenly responsive to aerial influences, yet not uncommon to most parts of England, — in *The Return Of The Native* it has found a soul ; and through the susurrus of its heather-bells rustling eerily beneath a wan November sky, there speaks a voice portentous that anon shall rise to the majesty of a funeral dirge, and sway with over-mastering might the destinies of those who come within its thrall. Like the solemn overture of the *Walkure*, fore-shadowing through the sense of sound the tragic scenes which are to follow, its plaint and chorus become a portent of dread and doom.

Thus to those who are familiar with the Wessex author's works, the region he describes possesses an added life and interest, wherein the landscape and the human creations of his fancy contribute an equal share. One cannot well eliminate the presence of Michael Henchard from the storied streets of Casterbridge, or Tess and Angel Clare from the luxuriant valley of the Var, or Wildeve and Eustacia Vye from the adjacent waste of Egdon. The great woods of Little Hintock, recalling which one involuntarily peoples their recesses with the figures of Grace and Giles and fascinating Felice Charmond, might be passed comparatively unnoticed by the ordinary observer. But to him who with *The Woodlanders* has wandered amid their green arcades, their leafy labyrinths, stretching wide with "easeful horizontality," become an enclave of the fates, epic in force and appalling in cumulative power.

Although the range of the romancist's scenes is wide, embracing a considerable portion of the counties included under the general title of Wessex, "Casterbridge" is the chief nucleus and Dorsetshire the main focus around which cluster a larger part of the events that are chronicled in the ex-

tended series beginning with *Desperate Remedies* and concluding with *Jude The Obscure*.

It is accordingly with a sense of acquaintanceship, such as one might feel on revisiting a locality he has known in years long ago, that one crosses the threshold of the "King's Arms" at Dorchester, — the "Golden Crown" of *The Mayor Of Casterbridge*. For it was here that the mayor, during the heyday of his prosperity, met his wife eighteen years after he had sold her at Weydon-Priors, a village near Andover in Hampshire, some five-score leagues to the north, and indicated on the map as Weyhill. Here at Casterbridge, at the yearly hiring-fair, honest Shepherd Oak in his smock-frock charmed the Arcadians with his dulcet flute; and shapely Bathsheba Everdene, descending from her yellow gig in which she rode from Weatherbury, dickered with the burghers of the Corn-Exchange, — "queen among the gods of the fallow."

Journeying southward from London, and pausing first at Weyhill on one's course to the county-seat of Dorsetshire, one may pass through either Salisbury in Wiltshire, or Winchester in Hants, with many another

historic resting-place *en route* to choose from. Yet though well provided with railways, the traveller in Wessex who would become acquainted with Mr. Hardy's scenes, and these for the most part are somewhat remote, will find he must oftener take to the roadway and bring his own powers of locomotion or a wheeled conveyance into service. Where one's muscles are well seasoned and one's time is his own, the former is no doubt the preferable means of journeying, at least where the scenery is attractive and the distances are not great; the pedestrian alone may pause when and where he chooses, and term the road his own.

And this more particularly in England, where the lane and footpath occur so frequently, and where the country-side beckons most enticingly beyond the pale of the highway. There is, moreover, a certain exhilarating quality in English air when the weather is graciously inclined, that incites to walking, and imparts a wonderful buoyancy to the tread. Instead of an expense of effort, one seems impelled along, with little apparent volition of his own. As an instance of this, I recall, among many exhilarating outings, an extended walk on the Dorset hills.

when, breasting a long, steep acclivity, I experienced the strange sensation of walking on level ground with no sense of increased exertion, despite the ascent and the maintenance of my former pace. This tonical quality that enhances the delights of the pedestrian under English skies is well conveyed by Arthur Symons' apostrophe, "On The Roads":—

"The road winds onward long and white,
It curves in mazy coils, and crooks
A beckoning finger down the height ;
It calls me with the voice of brooks
To thirsty travellers in the night.

"I leave the lonely city street,
The awful silence of the crowd ;
The rhythm of the roads I beat,
My blood leaps up, I shout aloud,
My heart keeps measure with my feet.

"A bird sings something in my ear,
The wind sings in my blood a song
'T is good at times for a man to hear !
The road winds onward white and long,
And the best of earth is here! "

Although we may not fully agree with the sentiment of the concluding line, — the inherent love for one's native land must

ever cause one to think his own country the best, — an English road and the prospects it leads to were, nevertheless, difficult to reproduce. And whether one's rambles be confined to Dorset, or extended to other districts less remote, one may almost always find, as in *The Return Of The Native*, the surroundings "made for the scene, as the scene seems made for the hour." Hardy's landscapes, with their vistas of tradition and romance, greet one, in some salient features at least, throughout most portions of Wessex. I question if there be aught more restful than the perfect sense of repose of an English country-side. Even during winter, when not obscured by inclement weather, its tender outlines and a portion of its summer greenness remain. Still the holly wears its "green eternity," the ivy its lustrous mantle, the yew its "thousand years of gloom." To its general harmony is united infinite variety; in which its graceful churches, ruins, and villages, its hedgerows and commons, its thatched and tiled cottages, with their gardens ablaze with colour, melt into park and dale and oziered stream, with fairest reaches of lawn and lea, or moor and mere and down; the whole bounded by the blue of the never distant sea.

And who that has ever experienced the witchery of an English June can forget an English twilight, when night and day seem only divided by a mellow film of obscurity or almost imperceptible fragment of shade? An English sky, likewise, though capricious and easily moved to shower and rain, is prodigal of its play of half-lights, with a noticeable absence of glare, enhanced the more by a marvellously colourful atmosphere that lends a heightened hue to sward, water-course, field of gorse and charlock, and purple of distant hill. Nor is its abounding animate life a less noticeable or engaging feature throughout the length and breadth of the land, — from the vast flocks of sheep which people the downs, and herds of kine grazing amid the lush meadow herbage, to the woods and copses teeming with game, and the colonies of rooks and starlings that flit over every field and hedgerow. Nowhere is Nature more exuberant, and nowhere do we find her so intimately associated with humanity. It is this latter feature, more especially, that the Wessex romancist has grasped so vividly and pictured with such consummate art. And in this, perhaps, consists the keynote of his charm, embodied throughout his most carefully studied

themes in a style as exquisitely finished as Bulwer's, and when occasion calls for it, as august as the chords of the Dead March in Saul.

By Mr. Hardy's Wessex should not be understood that division of the kingdom which figures under this name in the ancient Heptarchy, comprising all those shires touching on the English Channel, together with the adjacent shires to the north, — the Wessex of the novelist mainly includes Dorset, with excursions more or less distant into Wilts and some of the adjoining counties. Yet, while the localities and places that appear in the Casterbridge series are numerous and extended, the reader will vainly turn to the map to ascertain their exact position. Thus "Casterbridge" is Dorchester; "Melchester," Salisbury; "Wintoncester," Winchester; "Sandbourne," Bournemouth; "Lulhead," Lulworth; "Sherton-Abbas," Sherborne; "Stourcastle," Sturminster; "Shaston," Shaftsbury; "Budmouth," Weymouth; "Knollsea," Swanage; "Coombe Castle," Corfe Castle; "Shotsford," Blandford; "Kingsbere," Bere-Regis; "Anglebury," Wareham; "Ivell," Yeovil.

"Endelstow," where dwelt the fair

Elfride — “with eyes blue as autumn distance; blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a September morning” — is the fanciful name for a hamlet near Boscastle on the Cornish coast. The strange scene of the wooing of Lady Constantine by the young astronomer, Swithin, is a tower in Charborough Park near Wimborne Minster, surrounding the seat of the Deax family, and originally erected to form a feature of the landscape. In the imposing old ivied manor-house of Wolveton, overlooking the Frome valley, and but a short walk north from Dorchester, it is easy to recognise the home of the beauteous Lady Penelope, whose suitors “sprang out of the ground wherever she went,” and who finally married them all successively, according to promise. As for the places mentioned in the tract referred to as “Egdon Heath,” these for the most part belong to the author; Egdon itself being the name given by him to the extended barren lying to the west of Poole and east of Dorchester, now no longer an unbroken wild, but tilled in parts. “Melchester Moor,” in *Far From The Madding Crowd*, would seem to have been a first inspiration

of Egdon, much as Jefferies' "Coming Of Summer" was the bud of the perfected flower of "The Pageant."

A view of Dorchester from the slopes of the southern bank of the river Frome, or above the noble avenues of chestnuts and sycamores overlooking the borough and green river valley beyond will confirm the novelist's statement, which holds good with many of the less considerable English towns as well, that the city is the complement of the rural life around, not its urban opposite. And this statement will be additionally strengthened by a study of its populace and its comparative absence of commercial interests, as revealed by a stroll through its streets and suburbs. The old town, with its relics of a hoary past, has preserved much of its historic flavour, and so far as its pastoral setting is concerned, it is yet most truthfully described by Gay's lines :

"Now the steep hill fair Dorchester o'erlooks,
Border'd by meads and washed by silver brooks."

Still, "on either side low fertile valleys lie," while the traveller may turn his steps in almost any direction, to find himself journeying along "true Roman ways."

In both the town and its environment,

its Roman origin is apparent, — the town itself having risen from a Roman camp, and still retaining some of its original peculiarities of form. The public walks have been constructed on the olden ramparts or fossæ, the shore still frequently unearthing portions of tessellate pavement and historic coins, with examples of antique pottery and iridescent glass. Near by is the imposing camp or earthwork in the Roman form of castrematation, known as Poundbury; while the great amphitheatre of Mamebury Rings, and the vast intrenched camp of *Mai-Dun*, or Maiden Castle, are among the finest, if not the finest of similar survivals of *Brittania Prima*. Latinity is exhaled by the very names of the villages throughout this hoary *angulus terrarum*. Lying on the grass-clad crest of these ancient ramparts and soothed by the breeze from the adjacent sea, one might close one's eyes and almost hear above the song of the wind through the bennets, and the vague echoes of accustomed pastoral life, the clash of armour and oncoming tramp of the legions of Vespasian on the neighbouring *Via Iceniana*.

And still, no scene could be more characteristically English. The surrounding

downs are of chalk covered by a sparse soil, wherein grow the gorse, the yellow lotus, and buttercups amid the herbage on which vast flocks of South-down and Dorset-horn sheep are browsing. The river Frome, or "Var" of Mr. Hardy, a typical chalk-stream, dimples and purls and eddies along the low-lying water-meadows; distant hill and tumulus unfold their rounded slopes; and through woodland, plain, and grainfield, smooth, white highways lead to slumberous villages and quaint hamlets basking in contemplative repose; to grey and cypress-shaded churchyards; to lordly hall and nobleman's demesne; to mediæval ruin, Elizabethan manor-house, and lichened parish church. Mr. Hardy views all these with an artist's eye, and the added sense of a landscape-gardener who is acquainted with his individual trees and their proper setting. He is a meteorologist as well, in that he is familiar with the horoscope of the sky. He is equally at home as an agricultor and husbandman, as a shepherd and herdsman. A profound analyst, and close student of history, he is likewise an ethnologist. To his first love of architecture he has added, moreover, a seemingly extended knowledge of astronomy; and a poet by instinct, he is an

artist alway. Thus he knows and portrays his surroundings as few have the power of doing, in all their phases, mutations, and correlations,—by night and by day, in summer and winter, in the past and the present ; and in the future also, as a Seer. It is not strange, therefore, that at Casterbridge he should be constantly recalled. His characters pass by along the streets of the town ; his rustics and yeomen people the hamlets and lanes. For aught I know, the phantom of Henchard may be seen during the late summer gloaming, approaching with measured tread through the powdery dust of the high-road leading from Weydon-Priors. Or when the town is sunk in peaceful slumber, the strains of the pipe of Gabriel Oak perchance are mingled “in Arcadian sweetness” with the sonorous strokes of the hours.

Two miles from Dorchester is Hardy's birthplace, an old-fashioned cottage smothered with creepers, shrubs, and flowers, at the end of a lane in a secluded hamlet terminating in a wood and heathland. His present abode, though but a comparatively short distance from the town, on the Wareham road, is isolate and solitary, being situate on one of the barrows

common to Dorset which commands an extended panorama of the surrounding country. The rear part of the house overlooks the heath and the beginning of the valley of the Great Dairies; in choosing a site for his residence he would have his favourite "Bruaria" in constant view.

Coming from Winchester or Bournemouth to Dorchester, the train halts for a moment at the hamlet of Wool, with its flower-gardens and thatched cottages, twelve miles to the east of the latter town. The place bears the name of Welle in the olden annals, renewed by the romancist in the appellation, "Wellbridge." From the carriage windows, as we paused for an instant, I was singularly impressed by a grey and gabled old manor-house with its many outbuildings on the right; approached by an equally hoary stone bridge, picturesque as an abbey tower, that spans the sparkling river of the Frome. The stream was fringed with iris and bulrushes and its surface silvered with the white blossoms of the water-crowfoot, as it idled through the verdant meads and glittered gaily in the June sunshine. So striking was the grim old Elizabethan pile, and so marked the imprint as of untold sorrow upon its grave.

and furrowed face, that, involuntarily, I thought it must possess a history; and if ghosts there be, such must haunt its mouldering corridors. Its joyous surroundings seemed a mocking irony. Through centuries of eld and sombre epochs of the past, to what guile and evil had it not been a silent witness! What untold mysteries had not occurred within its antiquated walls; what lust and cruelty had not been enacted there! Could it but find a withered voice, "some key to that inscrutable appeal," that it might whisper the secrets ensconced in mildewed chamber and cobwebbed rafter, methought it might obtain surcease from care. Little did I think at the time that it is in truth haunted by the wraiths of Tess and Angel Clare, and that from here the D'Urberville coach-and-four proceeds upon its spectral rounds, although it may only be seen by one of the D'Urberville flesh and blood. The coach, it may be stated, is said to start from the manor-house itself. More than this, it is said that vehicle, four horses, and two out-riders all issue forth through a closed-up casement, of which there are several at the rear of the house. It describes a regular, unvarying orbit, though the route is not

distinctly stated. But from what an eminently reliable informant tells me of two apparitions, one to her husband and another to members of another family related to the D'Urbervilles, coupled with the direction in which the coach was going on these occasions, it may be presumed the round is as follows: Starting from Woolbridge House it advances some few hundred yards eastward to the entrance of Hethfelton carriage drive. Up this, it proceeds northward, and then makes a circuit westward by Bovington to Moreton Bridge. Traversing this it passes through Moreton village, and so onward toward the east to Woolbridge, and leisurely crossing its grey old bridge arrives at its starting-point again.

So the following day when I drove along the south side of the Frome to visit the ancestral house of the D'Urbervilles, I found myself face to face with the ashen, crumbling pile of stones that had haunted me as seen from the car windows. An old woman, crippled with rheumatism, showed me through the deserted chambers; and mounting upon a chair on the landing near the door of Tess's room, I beheld the portraits of the two D'Urberville women, one of whom vaguely suggested the heroine to the

author, and whose remote resemblance to his bride smote Angel with dismay. As I descended the dark staircase into the sunlight and clear air, the trout were leaping on the glassy surface of the stream ; above the manor cawing rooks and daws were circling ; while the notes of lark and black-bird rose in full choir from the adjacent meadows, white with the stitchwort, blue with the speedwell, yellow with buttercups, and pink with orchis and ragged-robin.

One may wander also to the interesting old Cistercian Abbey of Bindon, hard by, hidden amid its venerable trees, and dank and ivy-grown with time. Here one will recall the strange nocturnal scene when Clare in his sleep bore his bride across the narrow foot-bridge in the moonlight ; and passing onward to the ancient grave-yard, laid her down in the empty, lidless coffin of stone amid the ruined choir of the Abbey church. To reach Kingsbere, the most ancient seat of the family *De Turbida Villa*, " whence issued knights of especial note," the pedestrian may cross the heath, a distance of six miles, and find himself before the beautiful old parish church with its date of the fifteenth century. The drive along the north side of the Var, amid the hedge-

hemmed roadway from Woolbridge, through the splendid grounds of Clyffe House, past innumerable parks, estates, and dairy-farms, and skirting the villages of Moreton, Tinkleton, and Bockhampton, affords bits of scenery on almost every hand worthy of the portfolio. It all recalls Kingsley's picture: "Beautiful, graceful, complete English country-life and country-houses; everywhere finish and polish; Nature perfected by the wealth and art of peaceful centuries."

Near Moreton is the tract of heathland termed by the Wessex romancist, "Egdon Heath,"—the arena of those tragic scenes that occur at night in *The Return Of The Native*, which opens with one of the grandest descriptive passages in literature. Here too, when dusk has settled down upon the waste and the night-jar wings his evening flight, the Guy Fawkes watch-fires are still kindled on November 5th. A strange, mysterious region it is, this region of tertiary bag-shot sand, on which tinkle myriads of heath-bells, and where silvery mosses and the brake-fern have their home. One almost expects to see the "reddleman" and his van coming down the road. But he had recently passed, of a surety, leaving his rufous stain on many a shorn

•

South-down and Dorset-horn. The wild-bee is busy probing amid the flowers, his ceaseless hum and the skylark's song the only sustained minstrelsy of the moorland. Your foot sinks deep into the soft cushion of the heath, and every little while as you advance a startled rabbit scampers into his burrow. At intervals the call of curlew or plaint of plover rings over the hills and hollows of the wide expanse, as if to intensify its silence. The heath rolls and rolls away in billows of embrowned and purple beauty, like the waves of some enchanted sea; while the pure breeze fans its cheek and draws an elfin music from its bells. Each heath-spire holds its own especial hue, darker or less dark, purpler or less purple, according to the stage of bud or bloom or blossom past.

Viewed in its entirety, the moor presents a blending of browns and purples, interblended with the greys of the club-moss and greens of the bracken; changing constantly with the slightest change of hour and cloud. A passing shade causes it to frown; a gleam of sunlight illumines it with a subdued splendour of its own. It mirrors the mood of the sky; it transmutes the glory of the sun. But it is only during certain stages —

the period of its full florescence and when suffused with bright light — that it possesses an expression relieved from a sombre cast. At other times a twilight shade hovers over its undulant crest, and dusk lowers beneath its russet pall. Could its swarthy hue find its correlation in sound, it might be conveyed by the cry of the owl. Yet its normal and habitual tone sheds a sedate beauty more impressive than the blaze of poppy and trefoil hosts, or cloth-of-gold of gorse and broom. A sadness it exhales that is subtler than joy; a vague, unfathomable yearning it expresses, such as looks out through the centuries from the haunting face of the *Gioconda*. The gloom that enshrouds a canvas of Ruysdael's is akin to it; and a melancholy, sinister note it has, like some wild *Walpurgisnachtstraum*, as its heath-bells chant the fantastic refrain of "Endymion": —

"To Sorrow

I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far-away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind:
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind."

The heath stands high, like a watch-tower, upon the swelling buttress of the hill, and is nearer to Hyades and Pleiades and the influence of the constellations than the country surrounding it in placid terrestrial serenity.

Along the route from Moreton to Dorchester, on either side of the Var are scores of prosperous farms, with their cottages, ricks, steadings, and outbuildings, and sleek kine outnumbering the fatlings of Bashan,—almost any one of which might pass for Talbothays, the place of Tess's sojourn in the valley of the Great Dairies. The marvellous verdure and magnificent trees of England are perhaps the most constant source of pleasure to one who loves rural life. And the thatched cottages, old and moss-grown, and cottage-gardens sheeted with Canterbury-bells, snap-dragons, and stocks; with foxgloves, sweet-williams, pansies, veronicas, and roses; and window-sills gay with Calceolareas, Pelargoniums, and geraniums, are a veritable Joseph's-coat of colour wherever one goes. In the fields the charlock is in bloom, showing, as does the pretty little yellow lotus in the pastures, in great patches of gold. The cultivated treefoil, too, stains many a field

with a deep red colour as of wine. On poor soil the furze or gorse finds a foothold, adding its vivid tint to the prevailing yellow. Though now mostly out of blossom, some bushes may always be seen in flower. Hence the pretty local saying, "Kissing will go out of favour when the gorse is out of bloom." The broom, however, takes its place, a more refined flowering-shrub with an equally brilliant cloth-of-gold. In the hedges that fringe the smooth flint highways the may has passed, but the creamy cymes of the elder are appearing in its stead, with the dog-rose and honeysuckle to keep it fragrant company. Omnipresent, also, is the little yellow mouse-ear, the red cup-shaped floret of the pimpernel, the purple-bells of the foxglove, the tiny white star of the stitchwort, the vivid blue of the speedwell, the scarlet urn of the poppy, and great disk of the moon-daisy. Everywhere the thrush's song, the fluting of the blackbird, the mounting hymn of the skylark, and the ringing notes of the chaffinch.

One may ramble in nearly any direction about Dorchester to meet with a sure reward ; a mellow antiquity broods over and encompasses it like an Indian-summer haze.

It is a pleasant tramp of eight miles through the ancient village of Charminster and the valley of the Cerne to Cerne-Abbas, — Mr. Hardy's "Abbot's-Cernal," — now a sleepy, grass-grown village, but once a place of much importance which clustered round a celebrated abbey. On the breezy slope of the Giant's Hill near by, reposes the gigantic figure of a man cut through the turf to the chalk, supposed to be that of the Saxon god Heil, or Hercules, and therefore at least twelve hundred years old. Contemplated amid its solitary surroundings and the gloom of a tenebrous sky, it struck me, as its mighty outlines and something in its imperious mien became more and more revealed, that it may have suggested the powerful figure of the hay-trusser and Casterbridge mayor, — that "Jean Valjean" of Wessex. The ruins of the old abbey in the midst of its lovely Close, are beautiful enough in themselves to repay one for his ramble, and one reluctantly leaves its mouldering remains, impressed with a conviction that its winding turret-stair and empty chambers have yet a hidden tale to tell.

To the west and southwest of Dorchester, the open hill-country beyond Maiden Castle, though not as frequently referred

to in the Casterbridge series, is no less replete with the interest of vanished centuries. The old town of Abbotsbury and its historic surroundings reflect the very spirit of the past ; and influences of modern life appear but as a shield to arrest its gradual decay. In 1044 a monastery existed here, inhabited by monks from Cerne-Abbas ; its old ivy-grown tithe-barn and hexagonal tower being still well preserved.¹ Southwest of Abbotsbury on a commanding headland, stands the weather-beaten chantry of St. Aldhelm, overlooking the surrounding hillsides and the blue waters of the Channel studded with sailing-craft at its foot. An impressive landmark at sea and sailor's chantry of yore, after many generations of vicissitude it has served as a place of worship for the coast guard, and doubtless may yet figure in some of Hardy's "Wessex Tales." Were the wandering steps of the Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani directed to Dorset, they were sure to pause with advantage and delectation at this an-

¹ The ancient use of the tithe-barn, it may be stated, was to receive the tenth sheaf from every wheat-field in the parish, the parson's tithe being the actual tenth sheaf bodily taken from every field of corn in the district.

cient Norman shrine. St. Aldhelm's is an exception in not being included in the Casterbridge guide to rural and architectural Dorsetshire, — there being comparatively few places in ancient Durnovaria where the local registrar has not passed before one and pointed out the way.

As has been previously stated, Hardy's characters themselves have been largely taken from the surrounding country-side. Tess, and I doubt not the incident of her mad ride from Marlott to Trantridge with the spurious D'Urberville who wrought her ruin, was first suggested by a beautiful girl whom the author met driving along the highway in a cart. Old Mr. Clare was a much-loved parson of Dorsetshire, drawn from life with only a change of name. Shepherd Oak was known to the novelist as a stripling, and the portrait of Bathsheba Everdene was suggested by an aunt of the author. Coggan, Joseph Poorgrass, Susan Nonsuch, and even queenly, voluptuous Eustacia, who might have stepped upon Egdon from a canvas of Van Mieris, were personalities familiar to the neighbourhood of the scenes where they figured.

The marked feature alluded to as characteristic of the novelist's work — his making

his landscapes and surroundings sympathetic and concurrent in the movement and *motif* of his dramas — might readily be exemplified by innumerable instances occurring throughout his fiction, from the lonely face of Egdon Heath, with its suggestion of "tragic possibilities," to the white cock that crows thrice as Tess and Clare pass from the peaceful precincts of Talbothays to the tragic scene at Woolbridge House. But no one could illustrate this feature, presented as it constantly is in ways often manifestly apparent, often scarcely definable, though alway subtly pervasive, so strongly as the author himself has done in *Wessex Tales*; where in "The Interlopers At The Knap," Farmer Darton sets forth upon his second wooing, along Halloway Lane at the close of a misty winter's day: "There came a winter evening precisely like the one which had darkened over that former ride to Hintock, and he asked himself why he should postpone longer, when the very landscape called for a repetition of that attempt." This distinctive chord, audible in his first work, becomes more and more pronounced in his succeeding themes, where natural surroundings make part of the *dramatis personæ*, both through the agency

of sound and the media of sight and reflex feeling.

The mournful beauty of Nature in contradistinction to her more smiling aspects, which has been so strongly presented by Mr. Hardy in many of his dramas, has been referred to by Amiel in a manner not unlike that parenthetically touched upon in the exordium of *The Return Of The Native*: "Behind the beauty which is superficial, gladsome, radiant, and palpable," he says, "the æsthetic sense discovers another order of beauty altogether; hidden, veiled, secret, and mysterious, akin to moral beauty. This sort of beauty only reveals itself to the initiated, and is all the more exquisite for that. Its attraction is peculiar, and affects one like some strange perfume or bizarre melody. When once the taste for it is set up, the mind takes a special and keen delight in it. This, however, is not possible with things which are evident, and beauty which is incontestable. Charm, perhaps, is a better name for the esoteric and paradoxical beauty which escapes the vulgar and appeals to our dreamy, meditative side. Classical beauty belongs, so to speak, to all eyes; it has ceased to belong to itself. Esoteric beauty is shy and retiring. It only unveils itself to

unsealed eyes, and bestows its favours only upon love."

With its ripeness and old-world flavour, Dorchester is one of the out-of-the way places that it is a delight to linger in. The trains hurry on to Exeter, Bristol, and Bath ; and the big places of the guide-books arrest the traveller who is prone to forget that the individuality of a country lies amid its by-ways rather than its high-ways. The soft breast of the down is more enchanting than the stern peak of the mountain ; the placid reach of the chalk-stream lovelier than the rush of the turbid river. And yet Dorchester, so attractive in itself and its surroundings, contains no Eustacia Vyes or Cytherea Grayes among the many faces one sees in its historic streets. During the late lingering summer twilight, lovers promenade its leafy avenues, and wander along the verdant banks of the Var ; but maiden beauty belongs not to these. From old balconies and oaken pergolas of old-fashioned houses, young girls lean out to watch the passers-by ; but feminine charm and comeliness are equally absent there. At St. Peter's saintly fane, maids and matrons bend the knee, and join in the *Venite Exultemus Domino* ; but neither here nor there

may one mark "a winning wave deserving note." Indeed, truth compels one to say that Dorset is scant to paucity in its yield of female loveliness, — its women being, for the most part, spare and short of stature, pale-faced rather than ruddy, and extremely plain of feature. One exception only I recall; a haunting face encountered while idling through a narrow street, — the radiantly beautiful face of a child of eight who ought to prove a Casterbridge goddess eclipsing any that have thus far figured in *A Group Of Noble Dames*. It may be that in Dorset ancient ruins and female beauty do not blend. Certainly there one must confine his admiration to old architecture, — Norman, Lancet, Decorated, Perpendicular, and Tudor, — the green meads and hedgerows, the sinister splendour of the moor, the ever-varying grace of undulating downs, the majesty of ancestral trees and parks, the joy and supreme glory of Nature and the open air.

Yet on leaving Casterbridge and Dorsetshire — overpowering the visual landscape as a cathedral spire dominates the plain — one sees in shifting phantasmagoria the motley human creations of the Wessex

Seer ; his puppets that come and go and dance their apportioned hour : Eustacia "with eyes full of nocturnal mysteries," tending her signal-fires ; a hollow amid the ferns illumined by the flashing sword of Troy ; a solitary tower from which Viviette and Swithin are contemplating the stars ; a room in the Quiet Woman's Inn, with Caroline Arpent treading "the fairy dance" of the Fiddler of the Reels ; the figures of Tess and Clare and D'Urberville, of Boldwood and Winterborne, of Farfræ and Lucetta ; the forms of Oak and Bathsheba, Anne and Loveday, Paula and Somerset ; the van of the Reddleman and mask of Michael Mail, — while, sharply cut upon the distant sky-line, moves the colossal silhouette of a Hay-Trusser, wimble in hand, stalking the lonesome high-road on his final pilgrimage to Weydon-Priors.

AFIELD WITH JEFFERIES.

AFIELD WITH JEFFERIES.

In summer when the shawes be shene,
And leaves be large and long, . . .
The wood-wele sang, and wolde not cease,
Sitting upon the spray.

Ballad of Guy of Gisborne.

REPOSING in one of the double transepts of the most symmetrical of English cathedrals, the ancient fane at Salisbury, is a marble bust typifying a face remarkable for its strength and charm in repose, — at once the effigy of a poet, artist, and thinker, in whom the perceptive quality of beauty and inherent love for the beautiful are revealed by every feature. Calm and majestic, thoughtful and serene, it is a countenance that arrests the beholder, and haunts him, like some sweetly cadenced strain, long after the richly dight spire and hallowed Close of Salisbury have receded from the view. Upon the pedestal is graven this inscription : —

124 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

TO THE MEMORY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES,
BORN AT COATE IN THE PARISH OF CHISELDEN AND
COUNTY OF WILTS, 6th NOVEMBER, 1848.
DIED AT GORING IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX,
14th AUGUST, 1887.
WHO OBSERVING THE WORK OF ALMIGHTY GOD
WITH A POET'S EYE,
HAS ENRICHED THE LITERATURE OF HIS COUNTRY,
AND WON FOR HIMSELF A PLACE AMONGST
THOSE WHO HAVE MADE MEN
HAPPIER AND WISER.

To those who know his work and the character and history of the man, this tribute must appear as touching as the epitaph of *The Elegy*. And perhaps its modest sentiment, reflecting his own modest nature, is sufficient, — his work lives after him and speaks more potently than any memorial that man may frame.

Entering Wiltshire from Dorsetshire, the landscape broadens ; and though, like most of the southern counties, a country radiant with verdure, it may be questioned whether it is equal in pastoral attractiveness to Dorset, or in romantic loveliness to Hants, Kent, or Sussex. South-down sheep browse upon its countless chalk-downs, softly outlined in distant haze ; and sleek-coated cattle graze

amid the luxuriant herbage of its lowlands. Charlock and poppy stain its fields with gold and scarlet ; while its hedgerows and thatches and ancient churches lend their ever-present grace to its rural scenes. This is the region of *Wild Life In A Southern County*, a country more minutely described than almost any other portion of England ; though in the Wiltshire author's extended series of rural pictures, it should be remembered the scenes are also laid at Somerset, Devon, Middlesex, Surrey, and Sussex, and even close to the metropolis itself.

But to say that Wiltshire has been thus minutely portrayed were nothing exceptional of itself. Minute description is a relative quantity, depending upon numerous accessories before it becomes vitalized and endowed with a lasting quality. These essentials were inherent in Jefferies, who, throughout his references to Nature and Nature's works, conveyed his observations with the feeling of the poet and æsthetic sense of the artist.

For though prose was his chosen vehicle of expression, he was at heart a poet ; while, had he painted with pigments instead of tracing his impressions on the printed page,

he must have won a foremost name among the distinguished masters of the brush. The attributes of a painter,—a great painter of landscapes,—he possessed pre-eminently. To him belonged the apprehension of form, thorough knowledge of perspective, a keen imaginative sense, quick perceptive powers, an abiding love of the beautiful, and lastly, most highly developed of all his faculties, an intense sensibility for colour and understanding of tone. This latter quality constitutes the most striking trait of Jefferies' writings, apart from his phenomenal observation and the strong element of human sympathy characteristic of all his work.

Nor is this passion a mere love for effects, akin to the decorative element of art ; but rather a sensuous pleasure in the contemplation and study of colour for itself alone. Colours in Nature delighted his æsthetic sense and appealed to his artistic temperament as a piece of antique Chinese glaze or the hues entangled in an Eastern carpet delight the virtuoso. To him the smallest grass-blade contributed a note to the general harmony ; every day the mead was enamelled anew and its green seen for the first time.

To the question, "What is the colour

of the May dandelion?" he devotes an entire essay, — failing to define its precise shade with satisfaction, on account of the paucity or limitation of available descriptive terms for tints. Terms expressive of the species of each genus of colour were wanting; that is, terms which are available for literary use and that may be employed for serious composition. There was no book, not even Chevreul's, which could tell him the difference between the light scarlet of one poppy and the deep purple-scarlet of another species. The dandelion's brilliant disc could not be defined as yellow, or orange, or gold. It was, moreover, not glazed, like the corolla of the buttercup, but sensitive; altering as the day is bright or clouded, varying with the presence of a slight haze or the juxtaposition of other hues, and adding to its own hue the hue of that which was passing.¹ Neither can he find an exact similitude for the rich hue, after the faint fleeting yellow has become fixed, with which the sun invests the ripening wheat amid whose waving ranks there appears intermingled the red of the orange, the tint of bronze, and the hue of maize;

¹ "Nature and Books."

but these comparisons might not fix a colour that plays over the surface of its changing yellow sea.¹

His palette, notwithstanding, is singularly rich in light and shade, and in conveying the subtle gradations and chromatic deviations of the colourific scale. I recall no English writer by whom this appreciation is more strongly defined, or presented more vividly and constantly. Thoreau possessed this feeling, and also understood and was eminently capable of imparting both pronounced and delicate impressions received by the retina, though not to the extreme degree possessed by the Wiltshire essayist. With him colour flashes from every page, as stars come out upon the evening sky. The summer passes with its blaze of beauty, and the average person recalls, perchance, a turmoil of sunset dyes; while to Jefferies' heightened sense new hues were perceptible in the speedwell with every passing hour. No shade escaped him, and no molecule of light or scintilla of shadow might occur unnoticed by his receptive eye. The light was never the same on a landscape to him for many minutes together; the clouds and

¹ *Wild Life In A Southern County.*


colours constantly changed ; and he was present to record.

How sentimentally, for example, the tone of the atmosphere is rendered in the sketches entitled "The River" and "Nutty Autumn,"—the one portraying the bloom of summer, that almost indefinable hue which hangs upon the heated fields, and is consonant with the sickle and the wheaten sheaf ; the other expressive of the tawniness and ripeness which broods over the latter-year. A few sentences, merely a word or two in almost any of his essays, stamp the landscape and the season indelibly upon the vision. In reading the rhythmic conceptions that flow in such a constant stream from his pen, one scarcely pauses to analyse his style,—its colour is so pervasive,—except to note and marvel at its spontaneity and entire freedom from effort. That he did not dwell upon the rounding of his periods would appear evident from the vast amount of his writings within a brief space of time, as well as from the abrupt, if not almost careless, manner he often has of terminating a chapter or a vein of thought. It is rather in the body of a chapter, or an essay, as he became imbued with the beauty of a thought which seemed

to call for the exertion of his fullest poetic powers, that he stopped to pay minute attention to finish and polish of diction.

Like some resplendent insect above a flower, with irised vanes on which the sunshine streams, his essays scintillate and palpitate with colour. "Colour and form and light are as magic to me," he exclaims, while recalling ten years afterwards the flight of a white-backed eave-swallow, a yellow-hammer singing to the sinking sun, and the sunlight falling upon the crab-tree's flakes of bloom. For yellow in particular, the gold of Nature, he seems to have had an especial fondness; though this may be owing to the preponderance of that shade in the English flora, — a colour that is regarded by Walter Pater as the primary colour of delight throughout Nature, and in nearly all art. In the fragrant chapter entitled "Wild Flowers," he refers specifically to this colour-sense: —

"Sometimes I think sun-painted colours are brighter to me than to many, and more strongly affect the nerves of the eye. Straw going by the road on a dusky winter's day seems so pleasantly golden, — the sheaves lying aslant at the top, and these bundles of yellow tubes thrown up against the dark



ivy on the opposite wall. Tiles red-burned, or orange-coated, the sea sometimes cleanly definite, the shadows of trees in a thin wood, where there is room for shadows to form and fall,—some such shadows are sharper than light, and have a blue tint. Not only in summer, but in cold winter, and not only romantic things, but plain matter-of-fact things, as a waggon freshly painted red beside the wright's shop, stand out as if wet with colour, and delicately pencilled at the edges. It must be out-of-doors; nothing in-doors looks like this. . . . Out-of-door colours do not need to be gaudy. A mere dull stake of wood thrust in the ground often stands out sharper than the pink flashes of the French studio; a faggot, the outline of a leaf, low tints without reflecting power strike the eye as a bell the ear. To me they are intensely clear; and the clearer, the greater the pleasure. It is often too great, for it takes me away from solid pursuits merely to receive the impression, as water is still to reflect the trees. This very power is often, I think, the cause of pain to me. To see so clearly is to value so highly and to feel too deeply."

Yet while possessing the attributes of an

illustrious painter of landscapes, no one, were the choice left to posterity, would wish to have seen the author of *Field And Hedgerow* an artist, to the exclusion of an author, however honoured his name among those who have become immortal in one of the greatest of the arts. Jefferies' special place in literature, and his rank as a sympathising interpreter of Nature, it is safe to assume, could never have fallen to any one other than himself. There can be no second *Life Of The Fields*. Other idyls may instruct and please, but in a different degree. A finer literaryman may arise to hymn the pæan of the open-air; but the combinative qualities that speak from Jefferies' later work must remain to him alone.

The amount of his writings is so great, however, and the subjects are so varied, that it is impossible, within a limited compass, to epitomise them all. Incontestably, he wrote too much; he lacked the margin of leisure, and was constantly under the goad of providing for his livelihood, for which he depended solely upon his pen. Owing to his peculiar artistic temperament, as well as to various individual characteristics, it is difficult to compare him with some other Nature-observers who were equally as painstaking

as he. His work may not be appropriately classed with that of the learned Selborne rector, than whom none had a more watchful eye; nor with that of the Walden recluse, whose powers of observation in all that appertained to Nature's sights and sounds could not be surpassed. White was a riper scholar and classist, as well as a scientist; and Thoreau, a deeper thinker and a mystic, had also a wider knowledge of literature, in addition to his epigrammatic force and poetic gift of utterance. But *Selborne* partakes more of the quality of a naturalist's calendar in epistolary form, besides being partly a record of an anti-quarian and archæologist; while a great portion of Thoreau's writings exist as notes from his journal, necessarily disjointed and more or less unfinished. Jefferies was an essayist; and, above all, the idyllist and painter of country-life as it exists in England.

To recall his name is to recall the myriad beauties of Nature in all her tenses of the seasons; in a thousand conditions of light and sky and atmosphere; in countless phases of growth and blossoming. To know him is to approach nearer the heart of the flower, the mystic concave of the

sky, and the elusive verge of the horizon. The message of the wind and voice of the bird become clearer; the missive of the bud and precept of the falling leaf, no one has rendered more lovingly, more faithfully, than he. His extreme sympathy for the life of which he treats must strike even the most unsympathetic reader. Without special purpose, he considered it a great cruelty to destroy the smallest creature; and despite the difficulty he often experienced in identifying insects on the wing, he objected to capturing them. Their joy of life was so intense, the pleasure of living, the consciousness of seeing and feeling so exquisite, he could not willingly interfere with their harmless liberty. To the butterfly the rapture of the flower; to the bird the ecstasy of his song! Let the hare still leap in his lissome grace, the swallow trace his arabesques of beauty, the hawk describe his spiral in the sky, — “the sunny moment is to them all in all.”

At a glance his piercing vision swept each furrow and hedgerow, every down and coombe, every field and tree, noting their slightest movement and variation, their every sound and change. The mere touch of a leaf, he declares, was a talisman to bring

him under the enchantment of the fields; so that he seemed to feel and know all that was proceeding among the grass-blades and in the bushes. Day by day there was an alteration perceptible, always an added note to make, a new portent in the burden of the breeze, — “a sweet breath in the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows.” He derived an unceasing pleasure from everything lovely, together with that rare felicity of discerning it in the most commonplace things, to him always the most interesting.

The very cottage-roof became a register full of meaning, increased activity on tile or thatch marking the approach of spring and summer, as familiar objects in wood and hedgerow cast denotative shadows before. The mossed and lichened house-top had its natural history, its science and art, its seasons, its migrants, semi-migrants and residents, of whom a voluminous chronicle might be made.¹ He could write a whole history of the Reed Canary Grass, whose touch and rustle brought with it a sense of wildness, as if there were a vast

¹ “Nature on the Roof.”

forest round about, — the birds and wild-life that frequented it, the play of the wind through its sensitive stalks, its green vernal tints and yellow autumnal fires, the water wherein its sharp-pointed leaf-tongues were reflected, the changing sky which lent to it an ever-varying tone, its beauty, its mystery, its majesty.¹ The longer he studied a single locality, the more he found in it to describe ; and a fresh footpath ever yielded him a fresh flower, a fresh delight.

These impressions, hour by hour and day by day, his brain received and retained, as the reflecting-plate mirrors the images formed by the camera. Like a great landscape-artist, he has fixed not only the permanent but the transitory. No landscape has ever been more truly glorified than that of Wiltshire. Only, it is the glory of the truth that he has immortalized, the glory of a light that really is on sea and land, if one be present at the opportune moment, and possessed of the faculty of seeing. More than Wordsworth, more than the rhymed school *De Rerum Natura*, is he the true laureate of the English country-side.

The student of Jefferies, at first charmed

¹ "Outside London."

with his astounding insight of Nature, and the lucid manner with which he has presented its expressions and mutations, is still more impressed with the amount of work he has accomplished within his chosen range. This, apart from his novels, which, with one or two exceptions, do not enter into present consideration; although the human element of these not unfrequently forms only a frame for his prismatic setting of the fields. He had read the classics in early life; he knew Linnæus and Gerard; he had early read Culpepper's Herbal, — plants and flowers were full of ideas to him. Diogenes Laertius' *Lives Of The Philosophers*, he had studied at eighteen; and with Plato, Xenophon, Socrates, Sophocles, Athenæus, Aristotle, and others of the old Greek and Latin writers, he was familiar. To him as to many, the ancient tomes were the most solacing and profitable; the old books of Nature and Nature's mind he would have chained up free for every man to read in every parish.

Beginning as a writer of fiction, it was not until after many years that Jefferies found his true place as an idyllist. Then with rapid succession appeared that marvelous series of out-of-door sketches, first pre-

sented in *The Gamekeeper At Home*, and continued until the final essay of *Field And Hedgerow*. Among the volumes treating of the country life should be included *The Dewy Morn*, and *Amaryllis At The Fair*; which though designated as novels are really glowing pictures of still-life. The scenes described are largely those with which the author was familiar from boyhood; and in the person of Felise of the former romance is often reflected his own personality, and the love for country sights and sounds that he has invested with such breathing animation and detail throughout his essays.

This portrait and its accompanying calendar of the seasons—from the hawthorn's opening hasp to the last harebell on the hill—is on its part but an elaboration of a sentence fraught with meaning that occurs in the preface of *Nature Near London*: "To traverse the paths day by day, and week by week; to keep an eye ever on the fields from year's end to year's end, is the one only method of knowing what really is in or comes to them." To understand and sympathise with Nature, one must be far removed from all extraneous influences, and bask in the repose that harbours amid the fields, and dwells beneath the boughs and

rests upon the hillsides, — “ then the mind gradually yields itself to the green earth, the winds among the trees, the song of birds, and comes to have an understanding with them all.”

The same idea has been differently expressed by him in his preface to *The Natural History Of Selborne*, wherein he advises those who would see and know the life of Nature to fix themselves in some pleasant retreat, and work there with absolute quietness as long as possible. “ For it is in this quietness that the invisible becomes visible. The vacant field gradually becomes full of living things. In the hedges unsuspected birds come to the surface of the green leaf to take breath. Over the pond brilliantly coloured insects float to and fro, and the fish that never seem to move from the dark depths do move and come up to sight. Be very careful not to go too far, for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass.”

There is far more than this, however, which he has pointed out, unconsciously as relating to himself, in the first of the four lovely vignettes — among the most artistic he has traced — entitled, “ Beauty in the

sented in *The Gamekeeper At Home*, and continued until the final essay of *Field And Hedgerow*. Among the volumes treating of the country life should be included *The Dewy Morn*, and *Amaryllis At The Fair*; which though designated as novels are really glowing pictures of still-life. The scenes described are largely those with which the author was familiar from boyhood; and in the person of Felise of the former romance is often reflected his own personality, and the love for country sights and sounds that he has invested with such breathing animation and detail throughout his essays.

This portrait and its accompanying calendar of the seasons—from the hawthorn's opening hasp to the last harebell on the hill—is on its part but an elaboration of a sentence fraught with meaning that occurs in the preface of *Nature Near London*: "To traverse the paths day by day, and week by week; to keep an eye ever on the fields from year's end to year's end, is the one only method of knowing what really is in or comes to them." To understand and sympathise with Nature, one must be far removed from all extraneous influences, and bask in the repose that harbours amid the fields, and dwells beneath the boughs and

rests upon the hillsides, — “ then the mind gradually yields itself to the green earth, the winds among the trees, the song of birds, and comes to have an understanding with them all.”

The same idea has been differently expressed by him in his preface to *The Natural History Of Selborne*, wherein he advises those who would see and know the life of Nature to fix themselves in some pleasant retreat, and work there with absolute quietness as long as possible. “ For it is in this quietness that the invisible becomes visible. The vacant field gradually becomes full of living things. In the hedges unsuspected birds come to the surface of the green leaf to take breath. Over the pond brilliantly coloured insects float to and fro, and the fish that never seem to move from the dark depths do move and come up to sight. Be very careful not to go too far, for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass.”

There is far more than this, however, which he has pointed out, unconsciously as relating to himself, in the first of the four lovely vignettes — among the most artistic he has traced — entitled, “ Beauty in the

sented in *The Gamekeeper At Home*, and continued until the final essay of *Field And Hedgerow*. Among the volumes treating of the country life should be included *The Dewy Morn*, and *Amaryllis At The Fair*; which though designated as novels are really glowing pictures of still-life. The scenes described are largely those with which the author was familiar from boyhood; and in the person of Felise of the former romance is often reflected his own personality, and the love for country sights and sounds that he has invested with such breathing animation and detail throughout his essays.

This portrait and its accompanying calendar of the seasons — from the hawthorn's opening hasp to the last harebell on the hill — is on its part but an elaboration of a sentence fraught with meaning that occurs in the preface of *Nature Near London*: "To traverse the paths day by day, and week by week; to keep an eye ever on the fields from year's end to year's end, is the one only method of knowing what really is in or comes to them." To understand and sympathise with Nature, one must be far removed from all extraneous influences, and bask in the ~~sunshine~~ that harbours amid the fields, and ~~in~~ leath the boughs and

rests upon the hillsides, — “ then the mind gradually yields itself to the green earth, the winds among the trees, the song of birds, and comes to have an understanding with them all.”

The same idea has been differently expressed by him in his preface to *The Natural History Of Selborne*, wherein he advises those who would see and know the life of Nature to fix themselves in some pleasant retreat, and work there with absolute quietness as long as possible. “ For it is in this quietness that the invisible becomes visible. The vacant field gradually becomes full of living things. In the hedges unsuspected birds come to the surface of the green leaf to take breath. Over the pond brilliantly coloured insects float to and fro, and the fish that never seem to move from the dark depths do move and come up to sight. Be very careful not to go too far, for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass.”

There is far more than this, however, which he has pointed out, unconsciously as relating to himself, in the first of the four lovely vignettes— among the most artistic he has traced— entitled, “ Beauty in the

rose-loved hedges, wood-bine, and corn-flower azure-blue, where yellowing wheat-stalks crowd up under the shadow of green firs. All the devious brooklet's sweetness where the iris stays the sunlight ; all the wild-wood's hold of beauty ; all the broad hill's thyme and freedom ; thrice a hundred years repeated. A hundred years of cow-slips, blue-bells, violets ; purple spring and golden autumn ; sunshine, shower, and dewy mornings ; the night immortal ; all the rhythm of Time unrolling. A chronicle unwritten and past all power of writing : who shall preserve a record of the petals that fell from the roses a century ago ? The swallows to the housetop three hundred times—think a moment of that. Thence she sprang, and the world yearns towards her beauty as to flowers that are past. The loveliness of seventeen is centuries old. Is this why passion is almost sad ? ”

Besides “The Making Of Beauty ” and the vignette of Dolly in “The Field-Play,” Jefferies has depicted numerous attractive types of female beauty. The rounded curves of woman fascinated him ; and he envied the superb health and robust physique of many a maid who slaved amid the heated sheaves. The contour of a finely moulded

rests upon the hillsides, — “then the mind gradually yields itself to the green earth, the winds among the trees, the song of birds, and comes to have an understanding with them all.”

The same idea has been differently expressed by him in his preface to *The Natural History Of Selborne*, wherein he advises those who would see and know the life of Nature to fix themselves in some pleasant retreat, and work there with absolute quietness as long as possible. “For it is in this quietness that the invisible becomes visible. The vacant field gradually becomes full of living things. In the hedges unsuspected birds come to the surface of the green leaf to take breath. Over the pond brilliantly coloured insects float to and fro, and the fish that never seem to move from the dark depths do move and come up to sight. Be very careful not to go too far, for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass.”

There is far more than this, however, which he has pointed out, unconsciously as relating to himself, in the first of the four lovely vignettes — among the most artistic he has traced — entitled, “Beauty in the



The life of the labourer, with its attendant scenes in the wheat-field, hay-field, and the furrows, has been more effectively presented by Jefferies than by any other English writer. Equally comprehensive are his studies of the villagers, gipsies, cottagers, and the events that cluster about the hamlet; these, frequently presented, are most exhaustively treated under the title, *Hodge And His Masters*. Without stopping to verify the statement, I doubt if there be any of the Wiltshire essayist's works without some reference, or numerous references, to the wheat-field, for which he had an especial reverence, and was never tired of studying. It was yellow, — his favourite colour, — and its golden grains and sheaves represented to him the brawn and sinew and actual flesh and blood of man. He has painted it under all possible conditions of weather and seasons, of sowing and harvesting; with the birds and animals that fly over or frequent it, and the flowers that grow in it or about it.

As Hardy is the poet of the purple heath, so he is the singer of the golden corn; and Hodge and Roger the Reaper, in their minor way, take the place of Eustacia and Wildeve, as Dolly and Big Mat are suggestive of Tess

and D'Urberville. The very steam-plough and threshing-machine he has rendered poetical, and almost artistic accompaniments of labour. The flail has all but disappeared, the scythe, the sickle, and the rake, — the place of the harvester largely usurped by modern labour-saving instruments. But these, their stiff individuality of newness having become modified by time, are now, he claims, a part and portion of the brown earth, as natural and consistent as the olden scythe and reaping-hook.

“The machine is lost in the corn, and nothing is visible but the colours, and the fact that it is the reaping, the time of harvest, dear to man these how many thousand years! There is nothing new in it; it is all old as the hills. The straw covers over the knives, the rims of the wheels sink into pimpernel, convolvulus, veronica; the dry earth powders them, and so all beneath is concealed. Above, the sunlight, and once now and then the shadow of a tree throws its mantle over, and, like the hand of an enchanter, softly waving, surrounds it with a charm. So the cranks and wheels and knives and mechanism do not exist, — it was a machine in the work-shop, but it is not a machine in the wheat-field. For the

wheat-field, you see, is very, very old, and the air is of old time, and the shadow, the flowers, and the sunlight, and that which moves among them becomes of them. The solitary reaper alone in the great field goes round and round, the red fans striking beside him, — alone with the sunlight and the blue sky and the distant hills; and he and his reaper are as much of the corn-field as the long-forgotten sickle, or the reaping-hook.”¹

The drill, depositing the grains of ore beneath the azure dome of March; the steam-plough, heralding the violets and celandines of spring; and finally, the threshing-machine, winnowing the precious lode for the granary amid the fly-wheel’s ceaseless chant, — all these become equally pleasing as seen through the medium of his poetic vision. These modern aspects of the fields he would have introduced in painting, contending that by omitting them a period of fifty years is omitted from the picture, and therefore it is not real or typical of the pastoral landscape of to-day.

But had Jefferies been a painter, it may well be doubted whether he would have found these ideas practical in art, the prov-

¹ “Notes on Landscape Painting.”

ince of art not being that of the photographer. The old implements, which are classic and poetical withal, and which may be picturesquely utilized, still exist in the outlying districts, and there can be nothing incongruous in their employment on the canvas. The modern implements, perhaps, might be introduced into poetry ; for in this case they might be referred to with all their accessories of sound, colour, and even fragrance, — the dirge of the fly-wheel, under a leaden sky, telling of vanished sunlit hours, the drone of the steam plough's revolving drum on the tawny fallows, the clank of the mowing-machine laying low the perfumed clover and new-mown grass. Indeed, the steam threshing-machine has supplied Charles Tennyson Turner with material for two charming sonnets, in which —

“ The fly-wheel with a mellow murmur turn'd ;
While ever rising on its mystic stair
In the dim light, from secret chambers borne,
The straw of harvest, sever'd from the corn,
Climb'd, and fell over, in the murky air.”

This realistic feeling expressed by Jefferies has a certain touch with that of Constable, who also would bring Nature into sympathy with man, saying he pre-

ferred the fields the farmers worked in, and the work they performed in them ; and hence was fond of introducing villages, mills, steeples, and accustomed scenes of labour, into his compositions. But this was before the advent of the modern machine, which it may be reasonably supposed he would have left out had it existed then ; agreeing with Hamerton that the material world was not made exclusively for the purpose of being painted, and that both Nature and the farmers often make arrangements which might be good and reasonable on the solid earth we inhabit, but which for the clearest artistic reasons could not be tolerated in a picture. In fact, the machine in art is much like the nose in poetry. Neither may enter as a factor in the delineation of beauty, — the one in art, the other in verse. Even Tennyson's metaphor, —

“Lightly was her nose
Tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower,”

seems a trifle strained in its conceit. It is permitted to Solomon alone, says Gautier, to compare the nose of a beautiful woman to the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.

There have been few things, Jefferies states, that he has read of, or studied, which he has not seen illustrated while out in the fields. And this may be more readily comprehended when he tells us that it was his habit to spend hours in trees for the purpose of a better watch on animals and birds. The ornithologist and naturalist, to know the wild creatures of which he treats, must match himself against their natural cunning and quickness, and therefore must have especial animal instincts, and, above all, a patience that never flags. Great as was his patience, and accurate as was his power of observation, Gilbert White, during his later life, was lacking in one sense, the sense of acute hearing, which is necessary to a full understanding of wild-life. This, he complained, incommoded him sadly, and lost to him all the pleasing notices and little intimations arising from rural sounds.

Throughout *The Amateur Poacher*, *The Gamekeeper At Home*, *Red Deer*, *Wild Life In A Southern County*, as well as in nearly all his monographs relating to the country, Jefferies has portrayed the habits of its furred and feathered denizens as few have done before him, or since he ceased to write. All the birds whose shadows

swept the fields, or soared through the plain of the air above, he knew and described, — the lark heralding the birth of the corn, the yellow-hammer singing down the sun, the cuckoo crying, “Come hither!” from the trees, the chaffinch singing, “Will you, will you kiss me, dear?” the chiff-chaff’s ringing call, “To arms, to arms, ye leaves!” the thrush and blackbird, in whose throats the sweetness of green things dwells.

The phenomenon of the soaring bird, which from the days of Dædalus to those of Darwin has baffled the researches of naturalists, philosophers, and mathematicians, was a subject of close attention by Jefferies. But he has approached no nearer its solution, in the picturesque chapters, “The Hovering of the Kestrel,” and “Birds Climbing the Air,” than did Solomon of old when he declared: “There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not, — the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.” Beyond describing most graphically the soaring of the *Raptors* which we all have witnessed and marvelled at, as in wheels of volant beauty they trace their ascending spiral in the sky, he was

unable to record any new facts to serve as an explanation of the problem.

The impressions he derived from his observations, however, were that a hawk can soar in a perfectly quiet atmosphere ; if there is a wind he utilizes it, but it is quite as much to his detriment as to his advantage ; if there is no wind he ascends more readily and to a greater height, and will of choice soar in a calm, — “ in fact, hawks seem to prefer still, calm weather ; but considering the height to which they attain, no one can positively assert that they do not utilize a current. If they do they may be said to sail round half the circle with the wind fair and behind, and then meet it the other half of the turn, using the impetus they have gained to surmount the breeze as they breast it. . . . It is a fascinating motion to watch. The graceful sweeping curl holds the eye ; it is a line of beauty, and draws the glance up into the heights of the air.”¹

Of no less interest are his comments regarding the hovering of the kestrel, the commonest hawk in the southern part of England, who, he states, can hover in a perfect calm, and no doubt could do so in a

¹ *The Life Of The Fields*, 1884.

room were it large enough ; who requires no current of any kind, neither a horizontal breeze nor an ascending current ; who hovers in the dead calm of summer days, when there is not the faintest breath of wind. " He will and does hover in the still, soft atmosphere of early autumn, when the gossamer falls in showers, coming straight down as if it were raining silk. If you puff up a ball of thistle-down it will languish on your breath and sink again to the sward. The reapers are sweltering in the wheat, the keeper suffocates in the wood, the carter walks in the shadow cast by his load of corn, the country-side stares all parched and cracked, and gasps for a rainy breeze. The kestrel hovers just the same. . . . In a light air or calm there is no ascending current, or it is imperceptible or of no use to the kestrel. Such currents, where they do exist, are very local ; but the kestrel's hover is not local : he can do it anywhere." ¹

It is well known that the eagle, hawk, buzzard, and other birds of prey do not soar until they have attained a certain height, ceasing their soaring in like manner when they reach a similar level in alighting, — a

¹ *The Life Of The Fields*, 1884.

fact in itself that would account for atmospheric conditions acting as a support to the bird, and forming a counter-resistance to the natural law of gravitation. That a rising column of air or some peculiar buoyant atmospheric medium serves as a purchase, is unquestionable. But what unseen power possessed by the bird himself, propels him for hours in his aerial ascent and measured circles, without the flutter of a feather or apparent expenditure of any force at all? Again, extreme elevations are not essential to soaring, the bird-of-prey in many cases commencing his ascending spiral at a height of less than two hundred feet — motionless except for a slight moving of the tail sometimes in steering, or the leaning of the body from side to side in balancing himself, like the pitch of a skater on the “outside edge.”

The assertion has been made by Mr. I. Lancaster, who has devoted many years to the study of the soaring of the *Raptores*, that these derive the force to move themselves in the air from gravity. Gravity, he maintains, gives all the motive power; that which antagonises itself and that which antagonises air resistance. Once within the limits of soaring, the gravitating force of the body gives a liberal supply of power for all

the purposes of air navigation. . . . Why does not the body fall? From the reciprocal nature of action and reaction, the air is doing as much work on the bird as the latter is on the air. It may be hard to follow all the peculiarities of the disturbances going on under the bird, but it is certain that they serve to hold it up. They are mainly condensations of air upon which the body is falling—a force passing the rear edge of the bird's wings and wasted in falling to the tension of the surrounding air. . . . A soaring bird may be considered a machine for disturbing air. The motive power required for driving the mechanism is its gravitating force. Its effectiveness consists in the amount of disturbance which returns to the normal condition of the surrounding atmosphere.¹

Jefferies' conclusion that a kestrel no doubt could hover in a room if it were large enough, would appear hardly tenable, though compatible with his belief, verified by repeated observations, that the bird can and does support himself in the air while stationary without the assistance of one or

¹ "The Problem of the Soaring Bird": *The American Naturalist*, November–December, 1885.

more currents of air ; and this entirely independent of local conditions, and usually at an altitude a little lower than the tallest elms.

Concerning this phenomenon and the problem of soaring, the statement is made by Mr. J. E. Hendricks that an evaluation, if it were practicable, of the excess of the upward, above the downward, atmospheric pressure upon the bird, when it soars horizontally or remains stationary on fixed wings, would doubtless show that such excess is exactly equal to the weight of the bird ; and the rear expansion on a vertical section of a bird that remains stationary on fixed wing in a current of air, would be found to be exactly equal to the force exerted by the breeze.¹ Prof. Joseph Le Conte, in turn, holds that the phenomenon of soaring is due to differential air-currents that are always to be depended upon at a sufficient elevation, and which the bird skilfully utilizes to lift himself, — that is, in soaring the bird slopes downward with the wind, acquiring thus great velocity, passes into a lower current of less velocity, then turns facing the wind, and shoots up a slope which carries him higher than the level of

¹ *The American Naturalist*, March, 1886.

the start, then turns again in a current of still higher velocity, then descends again along a slope and repeats the same cycle.¹

Another recorder, Mr. S. E. Peal, observes: "It seems to me the solution is that when going with the wind the bird gathers momentum by going down a slight incline, and when it turns and meets the breeze this extra momentum is used in lifting the bird and carrying it over a shorter course. Thus it starts the next lap at a slightly higher level, but some twenty yards to leeward"; the recorder adding that the large birds, like the pelican, adjutants, cyrus, vultures, etc., do not soar in a dead calm, or during high winds — they prefer a steady breeze.²

But do all these recent explanations, together with numerous other theories, in which the observers invariably differ in their conclusions, serve to satisfactorily solve the problem or to define it more clearly than did Jefferies, when from the solitudes of the Wiltshire Downs he noted the sweeping curls of the mounting hawk, and marked

¹ *Popular Science Monthly*, April, 1894.

² "The Soaring of Birds": *Nature*, May, 1891.

the sunlight burnish the bird's breast and under wing ?

To judge by the only poem that Richard Jefferies ever wrote, or at least the sole poem he has ever published, the chaffinch would appear to have been his favourite bird. The lark, mounting the azure staircase of the sky, he has apostrophised more frequently, though nowhere as beautifully as he has rendered the strain of "My Chaffinch" : —

" His hours he spends upon a fragrant fir ;
His merry ' chink,' his happy ' kiss me, dear,'
Each moment sounded, keeps the copse astir.
Loudly he challenges his rivals near,
Anon aslant down to the ground he springs,
Like to a sunbeam made of coloured wings.

" The firm and solid azure of the ceil
That struck by hand would give a hollow
sound,
A dome turned perfect by the sun's great wheel,
Whose edges rest upon the hills around,
Rings many a mile with blue enamelled wall ;
His fir-tree is the centre of it all.

" ' My life and soul,' as if he were a Greek,
His heart was Grecian in his greenwood fane ;
' My life and soul,' through all the sunny week,
The chaffinch sang with beating heart amain.

160 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

'The humble-bee the wide wood-world may
 roam ;
One feather's breadth I shall not stir from home.'

"No note he took of what the swallows said
 About the firing of some evil gun,
Nor if the butterflies were blue or red,
 For all his feelings were intent in one.
The loving soul, a-thrill in all his nerves,
A life immortal as a man's deserves."

Or he is painting a hare, as if he held the brush of Weenix, and one could see the fur still damp with colour. The hare's fur is full of delicate pencillings laid on by Nature's hand. The black bud-sheaths of the ash furnish a comparison for his ear-tips, the brown October brake one hue for his glossy pelt, the buff bryony leaf another, the clematis the white ; all his hues may be traced or paralleled in the trees, the bushes, grasses, or flowers, as if extracted from them by a secret alchemy. In the plumage of the partridge are the tints found amid the wheat he frequents, the red tips of other feathers being reflections of the red sorrel of the meadows. Thus all the colours of bird, insect, and animal life are caught and mirrored from the wood-lands and the fields.¹

¹ "The Haunt Of The Hare."

Again, he is stalking the wild red-deer amid the fastnesses of Exmoor, — a stag in his glory of antler and coat of ruddy gold ; and once more Weenix or Snyders seems to guide his brush. The branching antlers accord with the deep shadowy boughs and broad fronds of the bracken ; the rufous hue of his coat fits to the foxglove, the purple heather, and later on to the orange and red of the beech ; his easy, bounding motion springs from the elastic sward ; he not only lives in the wild woods and moors — he grows out of them as the oak grows from the ground.¹

Or, it is October, when haws are red on the thorn, and the long file of the rooks pass to their nests in the yellowing elms. He is contemplating a large trout, over the arch of a bridge, above whose haunt a beech-tree casts its amber shade. He had discovered the fish while gazing into the water, and would strike the bridge with his stick or raise his hat every time he passed, to increase his native wariness, and so prevent his presence being detected. For four seasons he watched him with keen delight, waving his broad fan, or rising swiftly to a hovering fly ; and during all these years the

¹ *Red Deer.*

fish escaped unnoticed, with fishermen angling in the neighbouring pond close at hand. But one day the water of the brook was led off by a side-hatch. The next morning the poachers were abroad ; and he had not the heart to stay and learn the fate of the trout. He never saw him afterward ; it was barely possible he had escaped down the stream, — though, when crossing the bridge, he never failed to glance over the parapet into the shadowy water, which somehow seemed to look colder, darker, less pleasant than it used to do.¹

With summer comes the swallow, once more bringing the hay and white clover and warm winds that breathe hotly, like one that has been running uphill. The white bars across his back gleam and glide beside the dark fir copse, a quarter of a mile away. All day he threads the eyes of needles, coursing from half-past two in the morning till ten at night without so much as disturbing a feather. He comes with foxglove and dragon-fly, and yellowing wheat, with green fir cones and boom of distant thunder, and all things that say, "It is summer."²

¹ "A London Trout."

² "Swallow-Time."

What a fluvial picture ; what a carnival of colour and revel of running water is his pastel of the brown Barle River — flowing over red rocks aslant its course and racing round curving slopes ; now white with foam as it splashes in the sunshine ; with here a deep green pool overarched by trees where the green water laps at the purple stone ; and there, above reddened stones and reddened growths beneath the water, a light that lets the red hues overcome the others, — a wild rush of crowded waters rotating as they go ; the next bend upwards dazzling the eyes where every inclined surface and striving parallel, every swirl and bubble, and eddy and rush around a rock reflects the sunlight, presenting a woven surface of brilliance, a mesh of light under which the water runs, itself invisible ; while over all sounds the ceaseless rush ! rush ! of the river, like a mighty wind in the wood.

“ I will go back to the deep green pool,” he continues ; “ my eyes have less work to do to meet the changing features of the current which now seems smooth as my glance accompanies its movement. The rush of the river soothes the mind, the broad descending surfaces of yellow-green oak carry the glance downward from the

blue sky over to the stream in the hollow. Rush! rush! it is the river, like a mighty wind in the wood. . . . It draws me on to the deep green pool, a pool to stand near and think into. . . . The water is not green, but holds in solution three separate sets of colours. The *conservæ* on the stones, the growths beneath at the bottom waving a little as the water swirls, like minute seaweeds — these are brown and green and somewhat reddish, too. Under water the red rock is toned and paler, but has deep black cavities. Next, the surface, continually changing as it rotates, throws back a different light; and thirdly, the oaks' yellow-green high up, the pale ash, the tender ferns drooping over low down, confer their tints on the stream. So from the floor of the pool, from the surface, and from the adjacent bank, three sets of colours mingle. Washed together by the slow swirl, they produce a shade — the brown of the Barle — lost in darkness where the bank overhangs.”¹

“The Pageant Of Summer” is justly considered Jefferies’ finest prose-poem, — a poem to be read again and again with an in-

¹ “Summer In Somerset.”

creased sense of its beauty. Yet many of his other essays approach it closely, as, for instance, "Wild Flowers," "Hours Of Spring," "Winds Of Heaven," "Meadow Thoughts," and "Summer In Somerset." The sea, likewise, frequently alluded to by him, the forest, and the downs, have been pictured as few besides him have been able to picture them. Even the very heart of London, — Trafalgar Square, — he has invested with a halo of poetry.

And no one who knows his history during the sad years of his later life can well repress a sob when reading the first and the concluding themes of *Field And Hedgerow*, written during his prolonged and torturing illness, when, racked by pain and penury, and pondering on the drift of time, he could still see and describe the peace of green things that were without him to keep their calendar, — he who noted it so carefully and lovingly day by day. Like the "wood-wele" on the spray, he could not cease to sing. Without him as an informant, how could the lark he hears through the window know it was his hour? Without his book and pencil and observing eye, how does he understand that the hour has come? Orchis-flower and cowslip, they go on without him.

He hears, as it were, the patter of their feet,—flower and bud and the beautiful clouds that go over. They go on, and he is no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill.¹

Jefferies' home, and his principal abode until the last years of his young life, was at Coate, a hamlet in northern Wilts, a few miles distant from Swindon, and close to the Wiltshire Downs that he has outlined so vividly in *Wild Life*. The swifts were wheeling above the old homestead as I pushed open the arched oaken door of the high brick wall that encloses the farmstead and garden, where the present tenant, Mr. Maskelyne, bade me welcome. He had known Jefferies before his change of residence, though he had never read a line of his writings; and described him as an extremely reticent man who walked the fields with bowed head, ever intent upon his thoughts. They did not know him at the "God-dard Arms" at Swindon, they knew him not along the highway; indeed it was with difficulty that I succeeded in locating Coate Farm where "The Pageant Of Summer" had again begun its perennial course.

¹ "Hours Of Spring."

The heavy thatch of the cottage, with its far-reaching eaves, — a good-sized brick building, — had been removed since Jefferies' day, and the roof slated in its stead. But the ivy on the house and some lovely moss-grown thatches on the numerous outbuildings still exist. Overlooking the ha-ha and orchard, in the rear, is the room once occupied by him, with the pear-tree used as a ladder by the birds, where the robin would enter his window and alight morning after morning on the rail at the foot of his bed ; where the tiny wren would also come undaunted, perching on a bookcase in the room, and, ere leaving, would linger on the casement to utter her loud metallic call.¹

The old-fashioned garden is spacious and retired ; and screened from the roadway by the high brick wall, it invites to repose and a contemplative mood. The garden was beloved by Jefferies, who speaks of it in *Amaryllis* as a place for a poet, a spot for a painter, loved and resorted to by every bird of the air. Here grow great bushes of lavender and clumps of sweet-brier ; and white-fringed pinks and roses disburse their fragrance. Two ivy-covered summer-houses,

¹ *Wild Life In A Southern County.*

where the essayist often wrote, yet remain. To the right of the cottage and also almost opposite the front, are spacious green pastures with isolated oaks and elms. In the distance are the Downs. A short way from the homestead is the farm where the woman lived who inspired his prose-poem on the first June rose, and who nursed him so devotedly throughout his illness. Overhead the lark was carolling, and from the fields rang out the merry notes of the chaffinch and the thrush. Apart from the hedges and occasional copses, and individual trees and groups of trees, with here and there a shaw, the country is sparsely wooded. The downs themselves are bare, but for their browsing flocks. And yet from this landscape Jefferies composed his marvellous pictures, peopling it with its multitudinous life and beauty and history. Every rod within a radius of leagues has been trodden by his tireless feet, every tree felt the touch of his loving hand.

The oaks he loved and wrote of so fondly stand as they stood in bygone years. There are no such oaks anywhere else, he says; none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one

side in shadow, the other in bright light.¹ I looked for patriarchal trees arching the highway with majestic sweep of bough. And yet they are not wonderful trees in any sense. They were but the oaks of his childhood and his home, invested through association with the halo of romance. Only he could have painted them and painted his fields as he has done ; as only Corot could have painted Corot's landscapes with their attendant nymphs footing their saraband on the twilit sward. The eye but mirrors what the mind may see. Pan still passes by and haunts the country-side for the few who may hear the river's "inner voice" and the song the landscape ever sings. To others it is simply the country, with trees and fields and grass. Only the poet learns its secrets and sees behind the screen. Thus a stranger might find it difficult to analyse the magnetic charm that the home of his birth always held for Jefferies ; as we can never cease to marvel at his phenomenal insight of Nature, his deep feeling, his poetic gift of expression, and his wonderful knowledge of every phase and mood of rural life.

As I returned from Coate Farm through

¹ "My Old Village."

the peaceful hamlet and slumberous fields, a mellow sunset, tinted like the ripe wheat that Jefferies loved, flooded the homestead of the great prose-poet of the Wiltshire Downs. The old oaks of the highway were quickened with its rays, the thatch of the ricks caught its warm caress ; and field and mead and hedgerow were gilded with the splendours of the dying day. But within the near-by copse the yellow-hammer called in vain, and the vespers of the nightingale missed a listening ear. Softly the afterglow paled upon the distant downs, as one by one the constellations rose, and the young moon's sickle sank to meet the coming dawn. And a sigh throbbed amid the oaks and hedgerows, — a plaint of the evening breeze for him who had been with them and loved them and cherished them ; even unto the glow-worm in the grass, and the dewdrop trembling upon the aven's awn.

THE SPHERE OF THOREAU.

THE SPHERE OF THOREAU.

The eye does not see a sphere all at once, although the sphere exists all at once. Either the sphere must turn before the eye which is looking at it, or the eye must go round the sphere. In the first case it is the world which unrolls or seems to unroll in time ; in the second case it is our thought which successively analyses and recomposes.

HENRI FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL: *Journal Intime.*

WERE one who is familiar with the art of chiromancy to study the signature of Thoreau as we know it on the covers of many of his published writings, he must instantly be impressed with its individuality. It is neither characteristically American, English, nor French, and certainly is not of German or of Latin cast. It is distinct ; not racial, but wholly individual, — the stamp of a personality, like the imprint of a seal. One will scarcely have met with his peculiar capital “ H ” in any written or printed text ; while the curve of the “ y ” and volutes of the initial “ D ” are equally characteristic.

The writing is bold, as of one firm in convictions, joining to the roundness of most of the vowels a marked sharpness in many of the consonants that unite to mould his sonorous name. So that a person conversant with reading character from handwriting would at once perceive the evidence of a strong personality, where the practical and poetical, the imaginative and humorous, if not the paradoxical, are singularly blended; together with a certain occultness or mysticism which appertains to the luminary of the night, a striking resemblance to one of whose phases the initial of the signature bears. Through this graceful crescent we already discern the writer's definition of the line of beauty: "All dignity and grandeur has something of the undulatoriness of the sphere; it is the secret of the majesty in the rolling gait of the elephant, and of all grace in action and in art; the line of beauty is a curve."

Nor will we find the portent lacking in significance. It is to Thoreau's appreciation of the beautiful in the world of Nature and the rhythm of the year, that his wondrous observation owed its lasting inspiration. His very name is also significant, — indicative of might and power and familiarity with

the elements. Like the great god Thor, his vast hall had its five hundred floors; his spouse with the golden hair was the autumnal earth, wreathed with the yellowing scarves of fall; and he, likewise, would slay the World-Serpent. The surname, moreover, with its Gallic termination, has a cool, fluvial sound, as of umbrageous pools, and the flow of brooks through remote woodland solitudes, — of

“ Archèd walks of twilight groves
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
Of pine and monumental oak.”

The sphere of Thoreau is in truth a region untrodden by all who have preceded or succeeded him. Distinguished from the English Nature-observer who is meet to claim his companionship, Thoreau is more of a recluse, and his covert is more retired. For though he describes the meadows and the fields, together with their flora and their fauna, with marvellous accuracy, and has sung the song of the river and echoed the plaint of its rushes, it is with the mystery and wildness of great woods that his craft is most closely allied. The village church-spire, to be sure, is not always far removed from his sylvan scenes; but it is invariably concealed by the

thick screen of intervening boughs ; and the voice of its brazen tongue reaches him merely as a distant whisper of civilisation. He leaves the highway and the footpath, to part the tangle of wild-grape, or barrier of bramble, and enter the forest sanctuary. There his tread is scarcely audible on the mossy carpet, and he may lurk almost unseen amid the ranks of the *Onoclea* and ostrich-fern. He has held converse with Pan and has followed the satyr and the faun. He has met the oread and hamadryad ; and Orpheus, Æolus, and Syrinx have sung for him.¹

His garments are hoary with lint of leaves and pollen of pines, or coated with glaze like the wintry fields ; and to his beard clings the *Usnea* as to a spruce. One thinks of him clad in his suit, the colour of a pasture with patches of withered sweet-fern and

¹ In my Pantheon, Pan still reigns in his pristine glory, with his ruddy face, his flowing beard, and his shaggy body, his pipe and his crook, his nymph Echo, and his chosen daughter, Iambe ; for the great god Pan is not dead, as was rumoured. No god ever dies. Perhaps of all the gods of New England and of ancient Greece, I am most constant at his shrine. — *A Week On The Concord And Merrimack Rivers*, p. 73.

Lechea which imparted to him a certain invisibility, and to which he owed the nearer approach of wild animals. Or one may picture him plumed with wild-clematis and cotton-grass, and bearing a thyrsos of swamp-prinos unfolding its leaves afresh in the fall.

It has been sought to compare Jefferies with Thoreau, notwithstanding that no two writers could be more unlike in feeling and method. The veery and skylark are not more dissimilar ; they are as opposite as are the localities and the life of which they treat. The qualities of his native soil cling to each. Thoreau is more primitive and picturesque ; Jefferies more human and sympathetic. The one leads us to primeval swamps and tenebrous thickets ; the other to breezy downs and the life of the fields, with their strong accompaniment of human influences and older civilisation. Both, however, saw through the poet's eye, and in the commonest things learned to perceive attributes significant and beautiful. " We can never have enough of Nature," is the refrain of the one. " Let us always be out-of-doors," is the burden of the other. The world is the happier for the beauty and knowledge that both

have contributed. Each knows his subject equally well ; but their individual spheres are as wide apart as the orbits of the morning and the evening star.

Like Jefferies, who was constantly abroad in field and hedgerow or haunting the downs and coombes, equally for the sake of observing and for physical exercise which he considered an absolute necessity, Thoreau possessed an intense craving for the open air. It was his belief that he could not preserve his health and spirits unless he spent four hours a day at least, and commonly more than that, sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements. And this in winter as well as in summer, — when the booming of the ice and plectrum of the sleet sounded as cheerful to him as the consonance of crickets, or the call of the flicker through the quickening groves. And thus when taking his boreal walk along a woodland lake amid a hollow of the hills, we find him blithely chanting : —

“ When Winter fringes every bough
With his fantastic wreath,
And puts the seal of silence now
Upon the leaves beneath ;

“ When every stream in its pent house
Goes gurgling on its way,
And in his gallery the mouse
Nibbleth the meadow hay ;

“ Methinks the summer still is nigh,
And lurketh underneath,
As that same meadow-mouse doth lie
Snug in that last year's heath.

“ And if perchance the chickadee
Lisp a faint note anon,
The snow is summer's canopy,
Which she herself put on.”¹

Not unfrequently, when philosophically inclined, Thoreau reminds one of Montaigne, as in his animadversions on dress and worldly habits, his frequent citations and hatred of business, his doctrines of abstinence, and moralisings on friendship and religion. Not unlike Montaigne, he was “ a swornemie to all falsifications, believing not so much as is said, and nothing pleased to say more than he believed.” His satires on physicians might have been written by the Périgord essayist himself, as indeed many another paragraph like the following: “ We are hedged about, we

¹ *Excursions*: “ A Winter Walk.”

think, by accident and circumstance ; now we creep as in a dream, and now again we run, as if there were a fate in it, and all things thwarted or assisted.¹" Again, in some instances, his writings recall the *Journal Intime* of the Genevese thinker, philosopher, and Nature-lover, Henri Amiel. But he is far more Attic than Gallic as a rule, if we except his peculiar paradox,—abounding in fluid periods, rhythmic and graceful as the hirmos and troparion of the Greeks.

Reviewers of Thoreau have often assigned some obscure motive for his retirement at Walden, despite the fact that he has definitely stated his reasons for his seclusion. These reasons were simple. It is an indubitable fact that one cannot love man and Nature equally,—that which attracts from the one diverting from the other. To prepare himself for the light, he would repair to the shade. In the

¹ We goe not, but we are carried : as things that flote, now gliding gently, now pulling violently ; according as the water is, either stormy or calme. Every day new toys, each hour new fantasies, and our humours move and fleet with the fleetings and movings of time. — MONTAIGNE : "Of The Inconstancies Of Our Actions ;" Florio's translation.

woods, he states, he might live deliberately, fronting only life's essential facts, learning what it had to teach; and not, when the end came, discovering he had not lived. He would enjoy a broader existence, with a wider margin to his horizon than he might in populous city pent. The grand poem of creation, the strains of which the wind forever bears, he would fain listen to for himself. He would live without hurry and the friction of the world. He would anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn merely, but if possible Nature herself. He would hear what there was in the breeze, and draw nearer to the arch of the rainbow, to emerge at last from Nature's serene retreats "with the chirp of the cricket and trill of the veery ringing in his ear." Disliking artificiality, and loving Nature with the fervour that passeth all understanding, he would be his own interpreter, and himself indite her monograph. He would study, and have a speaking acquaintance with her through his own senses, instead of viewing her vicariously through those who might not woo her and win her confidence as patiently, as ardently as he.

A "prig" and a "skulker" are the last

terms which may be applied to him ; to these strictures one might retort with his own epigram, " It is not all books that are as dull as their readers." He loved his country, and revered the place of his birth. Though to dull eyes it might seem terrestrial wholly, to him the Concord River was a water of life, flowing through Elysium.¹ Nor may it be charged that his works " are strawberries from Emerson's garden." His were essentially the wild fruits of earth, with their native bloom upon them, and their racy flavour and perfume, — fruits which may be defined as " Hautbois," or " Alpine," in distinction from the tamer varieties and species of cultivation. His books have an individual tang and a sub-acidulous freshness. They are spiced and seasoned as Thoreau alone could season them. They "*pierce* and *sting* and *permeate*," like the wild-apples he tastes on his autumnal outings, that have hung in the wind and frost and rain, and gathered the essence of the sharp October air. " The country knows not yet, or in the least part," wrote Emerson, " how great a son it has lost." The most difficult task he stood ready to meet, nor was he ever found lagging when duty

¹ *Familiar Letters*, p. 316.

called. To the world he gave of his best ; his study of his chosen pursuit eventually costing him his life through exposure.

Of his published works it is not easy to state which is most emphatically characteristic of the man. *Walden* and *A Week* are his most literary productions, and upon the whole, represent him at his highest level, although one may not forget his breezy *Excursions*, nor innumerable poetic and lovely pages of his journals. From these we may gather violets during winter, or be encased with ice-crystals and hoar-frost in the fervid midsummer noon. It were likewise difficult to find Nature and philosophy so poetically interfused as in his week's sojourn on the Concord and Merrimack rivers ; and had he accomplished naught save the results of his two years' isolation at Walden, his life had been a most eventful one, prolific in the riches bequeathed to posterity. " Ah ! " he exclaims, " when a man has travelled, and robbed the horizon of his native fields of its mystery and poetry, its indefinite promise, tarnished the blue of distant mountains with his feet, — when he has done this, he may begin to think of another world. What is this longer to him ? "

Thoreau's facets are many-sided, and shaped in *outré* forms. They cast fantastic lights and shadows ; now reflecting things mundane, now adumbrating things mystic and translunary, — indefinitely far from the plane of man. With some of his odd conceits and vagaries we need not be deeply concerned. Genius is allowed to be erratic,¹ and it is always the privilege of the reader to reject the things that displease ; while his was the uncommon art of interesting those who might not concur with his opinions. And in his case, assuredly, any strata of alloy may be overlooked when one considers the pure ore he has mined in such profusion. A sceptic and an iconoclast, he was at least inviolate with respect to his personal character, and there was nothing malignant in his scepticism. A profound thinker and close student of literature as well as of Nature, he was an earnest searcher

¹ If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him. (Walden, p. 215.)

I cut another furrow than you see. Where the off ox treads, there is it not ; where the nigh ox walks, it will not be — it is nigher still. (A Week, p. 62.)

for the truth ; while his power of conveying the precise likeness of what was imaged on his own mind has rarely been exceeded. He practised what he preached, nor was he content to point out the way for others without being willing to follow the prescribed path himself. " Let a man step to the music which he hears," he enjoins, " however measured or far away ! " In his dogmas he is often intolerant, and though advising simplicity, his own idiom is apt to be euphuistic. Perchance his " fine effluence " may be best appreciated on every other page. But one should not always take him seriously. He is fond of provoking a smile, as when, for instance, he declares he is no hermit ;¹ and like the red squirrel after his frenzied chattering, one can fancy him dodging behind a tree to mark the effect of his tirade upon the listener.

Often he is hypercritical, otherwise, enigmatic. When he speaks of man or refers to the affections and passions, he is for the most part lacking in comprehensive sympathy ; though one may forgive him much in view of his fragrant sentence on friendship : " Constantly, as it were through a

¹ I am no Philosopher. — MONTAIGNE : *Of Vanitie.*

remote skylight, I have glimpses of a serene friendship-land, and know the better why brooks murmur and violets grow." This, as opposed to his declaration that he could tame a hyena more easily than a friend, who is material which no tool of his will work.

He is self-conscious and splenetic, full of antipathies and whimsical fancies ; and when he would be oracular he ruffles up his feathers after the manner of his beloved Walden owl. A strange embodiment of the cynical and the spiritual, of the cosmical and the translunary, together with a strain of the savage, existed in his character, — a certain element of the ghostly and uncanny, as of one who moved in a different sphere from that of his fellow-men, and whose soul was not actually human, but had absorbed some occult influence from the moon and the night. Imaginative, visionary, mystical, his views terrestrial not unfrequently become veiled in views ethereal, and sounds terrene transformed to strains celestial.

But he is always stimulating, even when walking in mists or delivering his idealistic propaganda, — and is never unwholesome. And when he would express the beauties of Nature, his "fine chaser's hand" seldom forgets its cunning, or his clairvoyant's eye its

power. He starts new veins of thought into being, and might awaken the veriest oaf from apathy. His paradox is delicious ; his epigram like the popping of witch-hazel pods, or the cracking of the ice on Walden Pond. One never knows what to expect from him, or just what mood a forthcoming paragraph will disclose. He looks at accustomed things from a new point of view, and philosophises from a different angle. Above all things, he is "hypæthral," to use one of his own favourite expressions ; one breathes a fresher, more rarefied air in his company. I feel as if I had been taking a cold bath after accompanying him on his *Excursions*, and to turn the pages of his journals is like a whiff of pennyroyal or life-everlasting.

A creator, he went to Nature as if no one had preceded him, and no nature-books had previously existed. A botanist or naturalist he was not in the scientific sense of the term. To him the criticism had no application — that the harm is not in the study of organic or inorganic structures, so much as the forgetfulness of large relations to which minute observation of Nature has occasionally led those who are addicted to it.

He could not approach nearer by a hair's breadth any natural object so long as he

presumed that he had an introduction to it from a savant. The polypody in his pitcher, or which is described by the botanies, held no interest for him compared with the fern he passed by during his walks when in the right mood. Its influence then, he says, was sporadic, wafted through the air to him. It was less the object that appealed to him than its relation to other things, — its accessories and surroundings and what lay beyond it; not merely the fact, but the corollary and all it was capable of suggesting, — however opaque or remote, however vague or undefined. He would seek the soul as well as the surface. He would see around the column and grasp the hidden meaning of the hieroglyph, and be the richer for the discovery of the symbol that all things wear. It was in this spirit when sailing down the Concord, and noting less the riparian aspects of the scene than the associations which the autumnal season wove, that he wrote the memorable lines: —

“I hearing get, who had but ears,
 And sight, who had but eyes before,
 I moments live, who lived but years,
 And truth discern who knew but learning’s lore.”

His searching eye and investigating mind
 bring the wild flowers and wild creatures


closer than do the microscope, gun, and scalpel of the professional expounder. In his own words, it is often the unscientific man who discovers the new species. His icons of trees and shrubs, flowers and weeds, grasses, mosses, fungi, and lichens are more like the sketches of old Gerard and Evelyn than the arid prosaicism of the latter-day botanist. It is true he has unearthed no bones of extinct mammals, or discovered any new plant-louse, or even plucked an unknown flower. But what arabesques of beauty he has traced in the most familiar creatures and things; and how eye and ear and sense of smell revel in the poetic impressions he has drawn! The practical we have alway with us; it is the poet and the dreamer of whom the world stands most in need,—they who may unhasp the golden doors behind which new treasures are concealed; who may clothe old and wonted materialities with a novel and delightful form; who plume their flights in a subjective rather than an objective sphere.

“I never studied botany,” Thoreau declares under date of Dec. 4th, 1856, “and do not to-day systematically, the system is so artificial. Though I know most of the flowers, and there were not in any particu-

lar swamp half a dozen shrubs that I did not know, yet these made it seem like a maze of a thousand strange species, and I even thought of commencing at one end and looking it faithfully and laboriously through till I knew it all. I wanted to know my neighbours if possible, to get a little nearer to them. I soon found myself observing when plants first blossomed and leaved, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into neighbouring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, besides attending at the same time to a great many others in different directions, and some of them equally distant. At the same time I had an eye for birds and whatever else might offer."

Here, then, is Thoreau's secret, — patience and unflagging industry; an unbounded love for Nature; and a poet's eye. The former are within the reach of all; the latter are alone the gifts of the gods.

Nothing, apparently, remained concealed from him; by intuition he divined the cabala behind the cloud and the story that lay



hidden beneath the coverlet of the snow. He is the poet of the Musketaquid, — of lichens and alder-catkins, of batrachians and meadow-mice, of fogs and moonlight, of oak-leaves and tree-sparrows ; the bard of the sphagnum and button-bush, of the owl and the musquash, of clam-shells and snowfleas ; the lyrist of the pond-lily and the hyla, of the gossamer and the garget. He has discovered the instep of the beech and the buttoned vest of the birch ; and it remained for him to demonstrate that it is employment enough to watch the progress of the seasons, and that it is in vain to write of the seasons unless you have the seasons in you.

A flock of fairy *Fringilla hyemalis* sifting down the snow amid the fans of the hemlocks, or a jewelled *Cecropia* moth floating through the gloom of the swamp, was more beautiful to him than all the nymphs of Rubens or shepherdesses of Boucher. His æsthetic sense was not marred, like that of Darwin, by a too categorical acquaintance with natural things. Sometimes, he confesses, he would rather get a transient glimpse or sideview of a thing than stand fronting it. The object of which he caught a glimpse as he went by haunted his thought

for a long time, was infinitely suggestive, and he cared not to scrutinise it, for he knew that the thing that really concerned him was not there, but in his relation to that.¹ Or, to use one of the various forms by which he expresses the same idea, "the eye—it images what it imagines, it ideates what it idealises." And, again, "beauty is where she is perceived."

Solitude he found more companionable than the person he met with in his walks. He craved wildness,—a nature primordial and untrodden by the foot of man. "I would rather," he says, "hear a single shrub-oak leaf at the end of a wintry glade rustle of its own accord at my approach than receive a ship-load of stars and garters from the strange kings and peoples of the earth." He welcomed frost and cold, for by its means he could penetrate further into remote swamps amid the water-andromeda and *Kalmia glauca*, where the fox had preceded him and where even his light footstep dared not tread in summer.

Thoreau has brought us nearer to the forest primeval and has presented the living wild animal in flowing words as vividly as

¹ *Autumn*, p. 220.


has Baryé in molten brass. Like Baryé, there was no quality of the animate breathing creature that evaded him,—his descriptions conveying the most subtle and fugitive observations on animal characteristics. These he has imparted with the skill of a great master who has pierced the deeper mysteries of his art.

Always methodical, he was accustomed to take certain walks at certain times; just as a fox stalking for game chooses the most promising covers, according to the season or time of day. It was never hot or cold for him,—all the signs of the zodiac pleased him alike: it was merely a question whether the *Medeola* or the *Pontederia* would be in bloom, or if he should look for the lunarmoth in Ministerial Swamp, or search for cocoons and vireo's nests along the river's hem. The spring-beauty might wait, so long as the witch-hazel was in flower; the odour of fallen leaves was as sweet as the first arbutus of March. If the song-birds had fled, there remained the tree-sparrow's sweet metallic strain, and the chickadee to lisp his elfin *day, day, day*. A herder of the seasons, no weather interfered with his walks; no recess of his wide domain was unknown to him,—his ways, his instincts,

his point-of-view all became subordinated to those of his pontiff, Vertumnus.

Annually, for a period of twenty years, many hours of the day and night were devoted to his explorations. He was present to welcome the dawn and speed the setting sun. With the bat, he hunted in the afterglow; with the owl, he prowled at night. No fair-weather observer, content to bask in the smile of June, he was equally attentive to his mission during the rigours of ice and snow. The hyemal characteristics of vegetation—a colony of pine-grossbeaks, or lesser red-polls, or the grace of a fir-wood, draped with wintry rime—he studied as assiduously as he noted the habits of the fish in the streams during the reign of the dog-star. All the most elusive phenomena of winter are as clearly defined by him as are the movements of the woods in summer. He even skated over the streams and ponds and plashy meadows, the better to study their life, partially inaccessible to him at other seasons. Thus he presents the cool and the warm side of Nature with equal care,—the boreal and the estival,—and who shall say in which he excels?

For the leaves of his journal, upland and lowland, forest and field, have been ran-



sacked ; like the sere leaves in yonder vase, these have been gathered far and wide.¹ His journal is at once his book of the seasons and his autobiography. Through this, as well as through his volume of collected letters, we know him, perhaps, most intimately, and become best acquainted with his "interior laws of being" that moulded his opinion and directed his conduct.

The swamp was his holy of holies, his mosque, his Allah. There he might converse with the white orchis and commune with the Indian cup, awakening to a music that others might not hear. Living so secluded, apart from his fellow-men, his senses became trebly intensified. Sharp as was Thoreau's eye, however, his hearing was undoubtedly the most vibrant of his perceptions. Sounds exercised a singular fascination for him, both the wild voices of Nature and music in any form. The contact of sound with a human ear whose hearing is pure and unimpaired is coincident with an ecstasy, he declares.

How the overture of Nature resounds from his text,—the diapason of the wind and harp of the pines, the viols of insects and choral of song-birds, the ripple of streams and

¹ *Winter*, p. 350.

196 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

rustle of leaves. Methinks at night, when seated in his boat amid the nymphæas, and contemplating the firmament on high, he too has listened to the music of the spheres. The jay jeers; it is as if he were blowing on the edge of an October leaf. A hyla peeps from some far pool, and lo! the first faint cry of the new-born year. The bittern booms; it is the strokes of the stake-driver, extending all the fences up the river, to keep the cows from straying. He listens to the pine-warbler shaking out his trills, even like money coming to its bearing. Like a piece of jingling steel, the wood-thrush discharges his song. The bobolink touches the strings of his glassichord, — his water-organ, — the notes falling in liquid bubbles from his tuning throat. In the hush of the heated August noon, the cool sound of crepitating crickets seems the *iced-cream* of song. Both the telegraph-harp and the wood-thrush possessed an abiding charm for him; “the strain of the Æolian harp and of the wood-thrush are the truest and loftiest preachers that I know now left on this earth.” He hears a red-oak acorn fall into the water, and thinks a muskrat has plunged; and from a distance a steam-whistle sounds like the hum

of a bee in a flower. The crow, flying high, touches the tympanum of the sky for him, and reveals its tone. The *wurrk*, *wurrk*, *wur-r-r-k*, *wurk* of the wood-frog encourages the weather to be mild, and the hollow *quah-quah* of the nuthatch proclaims the coming snow. The *conqueree* of the redwing is expressive of the sprays that are to be, as the arrival of the first woodpecker is suggestive of long-drawn summer hours. I sometimes regret that Thoreau was not a musical composer. We might then have had a new and longer Pastoral Symphony, another Erlkönig, a grander Walther's Aria, or a greater Rhapsodie *Waldoise*. This sensitiveness for sound and music is apparent throughout the work of the Walden maestro, — the dominant chord of his woodland lyre. It is audible in the dry recitative of withered oak-leaves, the hum of gnats and honey-bees, the strain of the telegraph-harp, and the ever-recurrent nocturne of the owl. Differing from Wordsworth, who could discern no melody in the *Ranz des Vaches*, Thoreau would postpone everything to hear the locust's song.

It is a sultry eventide of June, and he is drifting upon the still surface of the river, — one with the mirrored constellations,

the pond-lilies, pontederias, and yellow water-ranunculas, — watching the waving fins of bream beneath, and listening to the *basso profundo* of the *Rana* choir above. Large devil's-needles, encased in glittering mail, are coursing and clashing above the water, where the swallow dips his wanton wing, and bats hawk softly overhead. A ruby-throated humming-bird alights on a blue-flag's breast. From the thicket the whippoorwills call in fantastic chorus, and the "night-warbler" sings his vesper psalm. The dusky meadows are tremulous with the coppery flame of fire-flies, while low on the horizon flashes the heat-lightning from distant thunder-clouds, lifting their wings in unison.

"The bull-frogs begin with one or two notes, and with each peal add another trill to their trump, *er-roonk — er-er-roonk — er-er-er-roonk!* I am amused to hear one after another, and then an unexpectedly deep and confident bass, as if he had charged himself with more wind than the rest. And now, as if by a general agreement, they all trump together, making a deafening noise. . . . The bull-frog lies on the very surface of the pads, showing his great yellow throat and protuberant eyes, his whole back out, reveal-

ing a vast expanse of belly, his eyes like ranunculus, or yellow-lily buds, winking from time to time, and showing his large dark-bordered tympanum, imperturbable-looking. His yellow throat swells up like a small moon at a distance over the pads when he croaks. . . . Lying with my window open these warm, even sultry nights, I hear the sonorously musical trump of the bull-frogs from time to time, from some distant shore of the river, as if the world were given up to them. . . . When I wake thus at midnight, and hear this sonorous trump from far in the horizon, I need not go to Dante for an idea of the infernal regions. . . . I do not know for a time in what world I am. It affects my morals, and all questions take a new aspect from this sound. It is the snoring music of Nature at night. How allied to the pad is the place and colour of this creature ! His greenish back is the leaf, and his yellow throat the flower, even in form, with his sesquipedality of belly. Through the summer he lies on the pads or with his head out, and in the winter buries himself at their roots. The bull-paddock ! his eyes like the buds of the *Neuphar kalmiana*. I fancy his skin would stand water without shrinking forever. Gloves made out of it for rainy

weather, for trout-fishers ! . . . From time to time at mid-afternoon, is heard the trump of a bull-frog, like a triton's horn." ¹

And all who are familiar with *Walden* must remember the musical page devoted to the great marsh-chorister in one of Thoreau's finest descriptive writings, — the essay on "Sounds."

The call of the owl was of more importance to him than the gilding of his pages, or the unliquidated account of his publisher. Paddling down the river one autumn afternoon to Leaning Hemlocks, he beheld his favourite bird perched upon a stump on the shaded bank, — its horns standing up conspicuously, its head muffled in a great hood, its short bill resting upon its reddish-brown breast. For ten minutes he watched it, ere he caught it with his hand and bore it to his home, making a small cage in which to keep it for the night. While he wrote that evening, he noted there is ground for much superstition in it. It looked out on him from a dusky corner of its box with its great solemn eyes, perfectly still, and he was surprised to find he could imitate its note by a guttural whimpering. The bird would lower its head, stretch out its neck, and bend it from side

¹ *Summer*, pp. 54, 135, 152, 194.

to side, as if to catch or absorb into its eyes every ray of light, moving it in a slow and regular manner, at the same time snapping its bill and faintly hissing and puffing itself up more and more. The following day he returned it to its former haunts and its freedom.

Whatever the time of year, the voice of the owl is echoed in Thoreau's writings, — the Alpha and Omega of sound ; here, “ full round, and sonorous, waking the echoes of the wood ; ” or “ ringing far and wide, occupying the space rightfully, — grand, primal, aboriginal sound ; ” there, “ indefinitely far and sweet, hooting from his invisible perch at his foes, the woodchoppers, who are invading his domains ; ” again, “ reminding one of the dark and tearful side of music, the regrets and sighs that would fain be sung.” “ I rejoice that there are owls ! ” he cries. “ It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped Nature which men have not recognised. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day the sun has shone upon the surface of some savage swamp, where the single spruce stands hung with usnea lichens, and small hawks circu-

late above, and the chickadee lisps amid the evergreens, and the partridge and rabbit skulk beneath ; but now a more dismal and fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of nature there."

Of the makers of epigram, in which Thoreau excels, there are many ; of poets none has surpassed Tennyson's rhythmic references to Nature's sights and sounds ; of prose-writers I know of none who have so fully and tersely conveyed the ferine side of Nature as has Thoreau in this paragraph. It is the very antithesis of Perdita's apostrophe to the daffodil and violet of the "Winter's Tale."

Self-confessedly a mystic, this mystical trait reveals itself impressively, and is manifest in many subtle ways in Thoreau's observations of the phenomena of Nature. "I cherish vague and misty forms," he avows, "vaguest when the cloud at which I gaze is dissipated quite, and naught but the skyey depths are seen." He, too, had his night side whose intimations to him were "divine ;" and he would fain put more duskiness into his accounts of his nocturnal and moonlit walks, so that every sentence might contain some twilight or night, at least the

light in it should be the yellow or creamy light of the moon, or the fine beams of stars, and not the white light of day.¹

He was fond of walking amid fogs and mists, in which he found something creative and primal, and which, charged with condensed fragrances from wood and field, did not fail to suggest music to him, unaccountability, fertility, the origin of things.² Above all, he enjoyed being abroad at night, when he might see with the unconscious side of the eye that which the direct gaze would not reveal. Then the landscape became transfigured, revealing a mystery that was hidden and unknown in the garish light of day. For,

“ — not as the Day, thou art light, O Night,
with a beam

Far more dear and divine;

Never the noon was blue as the tremulous heavens
of thine,

Pulsing with stars half seen, and vague in a pallid
shrine,

Vague as a dream.”

The beauty of moonlight and the flow of waters enchanted him; and he loved to

¹ *Summer*, p. 239.

² *Summer*, p. 97.

gaze with all the ardour of the artist upon the forms of trees reflected in the river's twilight glass, on the silver sheen of pines in moonlight, and the play of shadows. "Not much before ten o'clock does the moonlight night begin, when man is asleep and day fairly forgotten. Then is the beauty of moonlight seen on lonely pastures, where cattle are silently feeding. Then let me walk in a diversified country of hill and dale, with heavy woods on one side, and copses and scattered trees enough to give me shadows. As I return, a mist is on the river, which is thus taken into the bosom of Nature again."¹

What was Thoreau's mystic "night-warbler" that he has frequently referred to? At nine o'clock, or later in the evening, he hears him "breaking out as in his dreams,—made so from the first for some mysterious reason;" and, again, as late as July 6, he "hears the night-warbler all along thus far." On June 19, 1853, he records in his journal: "Heard my night-warbler on a solitary white pine in the Heywood clearing by the Peak. Discovered it at last, looking like a small piece of black bark curving partly over the limb.

¹ *Summer*, p. 133.



No fork to its tail. It appeared black beneath ; was very shy ; not bigger than a yellow-bird, and more slender." In neither of the latter references is the time of day or evening specified, nor is the nature of the bird's song described. Emerson, it will be remembered, in his review of Thoreau, refers to the bird, — "a bird Thoreau had never yet identified, had been in search of twelve years, which always when he saw it was in the act of diving down into a tree or bush, and which it was vain to seek ; the only bird that sings indifferently by night and by day."

Mr. Burroughs says he could never quite determine what bird Thoreau had in mind. The best surmise he can make is that Thoreau had heard at sundown, or later, the air-song of the oven-bird, or golden-crowned thrush. From the bird's habit of diving down into a tree or bush, it makes it almost certain to the former that it was the oven-bird, whose air-song — "a true lyrical burst of bird-music" — he was first to give an account of in his essay, "In the Hemlocks." For nearly two years, he states, this strain was little more than a disembodied voice to him, and he was puzzled by it, as was Thoreau by his mysterious

night-warbler. Dr. Coues also notes that the luxurious song of the oven-bird long remained unknown to naturalists, and that the bird was denied the reputation for musical ability, to which it is not less entitled than the Louisiana water-thrush itself. The shrill *wee-chee, wee-chee*, he adds, may be heard almost any time during the summer while the birds are breeding; but the real song is probably only uttered during the pairing time.

Inasmuch as the oven-bird is not a thrush, but is the *Seiurus aurocapillus*, or golden-crowned accentor of the "warblers," it seems more than probable, especially in view of Mr. Burroughs' opinion, that it is identical with the "night-warbler" of Thoreau, who might easily have been mistaken as to the exact colour or size of the bird if seen at a distance, — the oven-bird being white underneath, but with black spots and streaks on breast and sides, without a fork to its tail, and only a trifle larger than the yellow-bird or goldfinch. The oven-bird has been so termed from the way it has of often roofing over its nest, a name much less appropriate than Thoreau's more mystical and musical appellation, "night-warbler," which ought to be retained.

Until recently identified, another mysterious bird of the night was the saw-whet, or whet-saw. Silent during the sunny hours, and haunting deep swamps and thickets, at dusk he begins his nocturne, which has been described as resembling the measured tinkle of a cow-bell, or gentle strokes on a piece of metal, or the action of a file upon the saw,—a regular measured, clear, persistent sound, continuing with intervals of interruption during the nocturnal hours. Naturalists have since identified this as the amatory note of the male Acadian owl, the smallest species of its family in North America, whose strange call is heard only during the season of incubation. The whet-saw has still another whistling note, uttered in the autumn after the breeding season is over.

During misty weather Thoreau states that his power of observation and contemplation was much increased. His walk became more suggestive and profitable; he would have things a little remote and indistinct to be described. The low tones of the leafless woods, the monochrome and repose of the wintry landscape, were full of companionship and colour and imagination to him. Winter was but another name

for a later phase of summer, and January but the metempsychosis of July. He was partial to russet and fawn colours, the dull greys of the life-everlasting, the faded yellows of sedges, the sere hues of grasses, and browns of withered oak-leaves, — tones suggestive of the wintry lisp of the chickadee ; tints recalling the partridge, woodcock, fox, and hare, and suggestive of fungi and bark of trees. He was fond of analysing the innumerable shades of green, and myriad colour-gradations of leaves. By no one has the splendour of a North American autumn been painted as by Thoreau in the chapter, “Autumnal Tints.” It were equally difficult to surpass scores of his floral pictures, like those of the lupine, painted-cup, great-fringed orchis, water-lily, and witch-hazel.

In the picturesqueness of his portraits of trees, he surpasses Evelyn and Downing ; and his woods are as full of chequered shade as the Forest of Arden, or a glade of Diaz. One wishes the great *Sequoia* and the redwood were natives of New England, if only that they might have been described by Thoreau. Who may forget the death of the noble pine, which he witnessed with a groan from Fair Haven Hill,

waving in solitary majesty over the sprout-land, its top visible against the hill of Conantum; when the manikins at its base fled from their crime, and the tree slowly and majestically started, as if only swayed by a summer breeze, and would return without a sigh to its location in the air; then fanning the hillside with its fall, and lying down to its bed in the valley, from which it is never to rise, as softly as a feather, folding its green mantle about it like a warrior. But, hark! . . . you only saw; you did not hear. There now comes up a deafening crash from earth, proclaiming that even trees do not die without a groan.¹

Yet for all his perceptivity, fine fancy, and wide knowledge, he was modest at heart, despite his vein of wilful exaggeration and his self-consciousness. Like all true geniuses, he was not satisfied with his work of observation, exhaustive as it was. "I was always conscious of sounds in Nature," he says, "which my ears could not hear, that I caught but the prelude to a strain. She always retreats as I advance. Away behind and behind is she and her meaning. Will not this faith and expectation make itself ears at length? I never

¹ *Winter*, p. 63.

saw to the end, but the best part was unseen and unheard. . . . You glance up these paths, closely embraced by bent trees, as through the side aisles of a cathedral, and expect to hear a choir chanting from their depths. You are never so far in them as they are far before you. Their secret is where you are not, and where your feet can never carry you."¹

With a strong Eastern cast to his nature, to odours he was as sensitive as an Oriental; and, like Montaigne, he loved greatly to be entertained with sweet smells, hating exceedingly all manner of "sowre and ill savours." There existed for him no scent in society so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so healthful and restorative as the life-everlasting on high pastures. With the sight of sassafras he

¹ *Winter*, pp. 287, 417.

The mystery of Nature and life hover about the columned temple of the forest. The secret is always behind a tree, as of old time it was always behind the pillar of the temple. . . . Thus partly concealed in full day, the forest always contains a mystery. The idea that there may be something in the dim arches held up by the round columns of the beeches lures the footsteps onwards.—RICHARD JEFFERIES: "Buckhurst Park," "Forest."

was always exhilarated, and he had an especial fondness for the odour of autumnal decay, — “the musty fragrance of the decaying year.” In the warm summer-presaging scent from dry oak and other leaves, he smelled the estival season from afar.

Going along the old Carlisle road, where all wild things abounded, he is struck by the gratifying savour of the *Dicksonia* fern, whose shrivelled fronds have extracted an essence from the frost, — that haunting aroma of autumnal blight with which Nature’s garments are perfumed, like old arras, during the latter-year. The scent of an October frond in his chamber, he declares, will take him far up-country in a twinkling.¹ The strong rank smell of ferns just blossoming, during late spring, affects him equally. In the shoots of the fir-balsam, after being plucked for a few days, he traces a resemblance to the odour of strawberries, — a very rich, delicious, aromatic, spicy fragrance. The inflorescence of the wild blackberry reminds him of the aroma of wholesome fruits. He notes the agreeable acid scent of high blueberry bushes in bloom, and an astringent, agreeable, cherry-like odour from the flowers of the

¹ *Autumn*, p. 10.

partridge-vine as he walks over its springy carpet. In the walnut he detects a rich nutmeg fragrance, while from the unrolled leaf-bud of the yellow-lily attached to its root, which he finds in the muskrat holes along the frosted river-banks, whither the rats have carried it for food, he perceives the same scent as that exhaled by the lily-flower itself when its chalice is unfolded to the warmth of June.

The locust-blossom was more agreeable to his eye than to his sensitive nostrils; while strange to relate, he disliked the rich perfume of the wild-grape in flower. Of the odour of the elder, bass-wood, spice-bush, and clethra, he does not speak, nor of the pyrola, with its orchid-like odour, or the ground-nut, with its delicious violet fragrance. Neither does he refer to the incense exhaled by the plume-grass, and by withered sedges on mild, dank, wintry days, as if their tawny leaves and panicles had mellowed in some dim cathedral sacristy, and been brushed by priestly robes. The adder's-tongue *Arethusa*, and the *Pogonia*, smelled to him exactly like a snake, and he hurried by the carrion-flower as he would from a charnel-house.

Many a perfume that delights him — “ fu-

gacious fragrances of the meadows and the woods" — he cannot trace to its source, — drifts of odour, perchance, from low grounds and hollows, the emanations, mayhap, of herbs and leaves which the June wind has swept with its fan, or perhaps of floating pollen in the air. This untraceable ambrosial censer he refers to frequently. "Can that meadow-fragrance come from the purple summits of the *Eupatorium*?" he finally asks. He does not suggest it may have been wafted from distant clover or hay-fields, or possibly from fields of flowering bean. So keen a sensitiveness for odour as was possessed by Thoreau is usually characteristic of a highly wrought and subtile temperament, and, joined to his appreciation for sound, and his acute colour-perceptivity, is not the least remarkable among his many striking physical characteristics.

An ascetic by nature, eschewing luxury and the normal forms of comfort, his character nevertheless presents the singular complexity of that of an anchorite and a voluptuary combined. He was an ascetic as regards the purity and abstemiousness of his life. He was a sensualist so far as the gratification of the major, but more refined portion of the organs of sense are con-

cerned, — in his hyper-impressibility to the sensations of hearing, seeing, and smelling. These were his “Three Graces,” who were ever present, and who supplied the more questionable place of a Bacchante, or a Bacchant. He at least sought for no Lorelei in Walden Pond; nor would he have cared for a Vatel to immerse its fishes in the most seductive *bain-marie*.

Had Thoreau lived until the present, he would scarcely have had cause to complain of his express-package of upwards of seven hundred books — the remaining portion of *A Week* — returned him four years after publication by his bookseller. And yet oftentimes even great geniuses require to die before they are appreciated. It is the history of authorship and of art. Authors come and authors go, to be overlooked by one decade and remembered by another. And perhaps the appreciation of Thoreau — a unique personage in literature — might still be present as a latent force, were he existent now. It was not until the death of Jefferies that he was really apprehended; and not until a short time ago was Hardy known otherwise than as a novelist, and that in a limited degree, though it is more than twenty years since the publication of his ex-

quisite country idyls, *Under The Greenwood Tree*, and *Far From The Madding Crowd*.

In view of these and numerous kindred instances, it may well be supposed that there exists what may be termed a conventional admiration for Nature, having its flux and reflux, becoming with many a matter of mode, much like the changes in attire. The intrinsic love for Nature exists of course with the few ; but it would seem to require the mould of fashion ere it is professed by the many. But the sale, or lack of sale, of his volumes affected the Walden philosopher little, and he placidly returned to the elaboration of his precept, *Tempora, tempore, tempera*.

Though one find the mist-wreaths absent from the river, and the haze faded from the hills ; though the telegraph-harp be silent, and the music of the pines be stilled, — he who visits Concord and its vicinity will yet view a region much such as has been described by its most characteristic genius : a country of alternate forest, field, and meadow, with placid river-reaches, and reposeful views across the distant hill-ranges ; a region rich in its flora and fauna, the variety of its streams and ponds, and singu-

larly receptive to the influences of the sky and passing hour. And though the locomotive, hourly depositing its loads of pleasure-seekers, has ruthlessly invaded the solitudes of Walden, and merry-makers shout where Thoreau rhapsodised and sang, one may wander far to equal the serenity and beauty of its pond and confluent waters,—a district, like most portions of New England, abounding in grace and charm. The visitor for a day or a week, however, may not hope to summon the spirit that its genius took years to woo. Neither may he expect to have the pond yield its virginal colour and its mystery who comes but to view its surface and its outer side. To perceive the full beauty of Thoreau's scenes, one must possess Thoreau's eye and idealism, and bring with him for insignia Thoreau's receptive faculty and poetic power of interpretation.

Vainly now one may search for the bean-field, where the philosopher's hoe played its merry tune; while the site of his sylvan abode, a few rods from the sparkling waters of the pond, is now marked by a simple mound of stones. Of recent years the waters of Walden Pond have been led to Concord for the village supply, as Thoreau's crystalline thoughts have flowed to coun-

tries far remote from the scene of his hermitage. The fringed shores of the pond have likewise been additionally thinned by the axe; but in the June gloaming the wood-thrush still launches his evening hymn, "faintly from far" the owl cries in the Lincoln woods, and the whippoorwill salutes the evening star.

The voices of the twilight recall him who has regaled us with philosophy and paradox, with Orientalism and transcendentalism, and who has presented Nature in a new and more attractive garb; whose spirit is infectious, whose pages are an ever-fresh delight, and whose memory, like the ever-green fern, remains perennial. And as the evening breeze fingers the leaves of the aspens, and dimples the surface of the pond, methinks it bears the burden of Thoreau's characteristic strain:—

" My life is like a stroll upon the beach,
As near the ocean's edge as I can go;
My tardy steps its waves sometimes o'erreach,
Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

" My sole employment 't is, and scrupulous care,
To place my gains beyond the reach of tides,
Each smoother pebble, and each shell more rare,
Which ocean kindly to my hand confides.

218 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

“ I have but few companions on the shore;
They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea;
Yet oft I think the ocean they’ve sailed o’er
Is deeper known upon the strand to me.

“ The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view;
Along the shore my hand is on its pulse,
And I converse with many a shipwrecked
crew.”

701

A RAMBLE WITH BURROUGHS.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".

A RAMBLE WITH BURROUGHS.

"Te Deum amoris!" sang the throstle cocke,
Tuball himself, the first musician,
With key of armony, could not unlocke
So sweete tune as that the throstle can.

CHAUCER.

NO objects of the animate world offer a more fertile theme for poetic treatment than the great galaxy of the birds, as annually they proclaim the resurrection of the year, and with their voice and presence lend a companionship to outward scenes that nothing else may so effectually impart. From the dove, bearing the olive-branch, to the mavis, nightingale, and our own beloved choristers of forest, field, and garden, they are invariably associated in our minds with whatever is fairest and most attractive. Indeed, Nature were scarcely less companionable without birds than without flowers. To those possessed of a musical ear and a keen appreciation for sounds, it were a question which would prove the greater

deprivation. An artist, if pressed for a choice, would probably choose the flower; a poet, in most instances, would retain the bird.

The bird upon the spray was the first musician, — the primal genesis of song. From the arc of his tiny throat may be traced the origin and subsequent development of music and concord of sweet sounds, — the lyre and lute, rebeck and harpsichord, flute and hautboy; the plaint of viols, and thrilling harmony of reeds. The great *Rana*, it is possible, might have suggested the trombone, and the cicada the cymbals, while the wind, the lapse of flowing waters, and sound of surf upon the shingle, may have been the foundation of other forms of instrumental expression; but to the bird mainly belongs the origin of music, and, indirectly through man's development, the development and present perfection of the art itself. The earliest master of melody, his was likewise the first poetic voice to hymn Nature's manifold charms; and he still remains the laureate of the outer world, the singer of the green leaf and sunny hour, the lutanist of the opening bud and the season's rhythmic span.

How welcome the first bluebird's warble

and song-sparrow's vernal lay, audible ere leaves unsheathe their chrysalides, and while the snow still lingers amid the shaded hollows! With what exultant glee the white-throat winds his silver horn, and thrush and bobolink, finch and oriole, with warblers innumerable, acclaim the heyday of the year, — when the wind pauses in its passage through the beech-wood to hearken to the hermit's chant, and violets bloom fairer for the veery's song! The very voice of the crow ringing through the welkin's wintry arch, and lisp of the chickadee amid the frost-bound woods, attune the landscape to a tenderer grace.

But to most persons birds exist merely as pleasing features of man's surroundings, or minister to his well-being and delight, not unlike the sunshine, the flora, and the starlit sky. Only to the relatively few is accorded the gift to rightly define their speech, and know the meaning of their ways. The appreciative observers, and even the scientific recorders, are many; the true interpreters are few.

Unless in Oriental lands, where the bulbul sings, the nightingale is almost universally considered the foremost songster, — a fact due not only to the intrinsic quality of

his voice, but equally to his peculiarity of singing at night, when most birds are silent, as well as to the constant tributes to his minstrelsy that occur in British and continental verse. He is *par excellence* the bird of the poets, extolled by them as the prince of songsters, as the rose is termed the queen of flowers. In Great Britain, however, though the poets' distinction usually prevails, there are those who accord to the thrush an equal place. One will remember Chaucer's and Burns' many tributes to his melodious voice, — the "throstle with his note so true," of the "Midsummer-Night's Dream;" Montgomery's thrush, "enrapturing heaven and earth;" Shenstone's throstle, "chanting the rising year;" and the many acclaiming notes of other bards, — among which none are more appreciative than those of Alfred Austin: —

"Hearing thee flute, who pines or grieves
For vernal smiles and showers?
Thy voice is greener than the leaves,
And fresher than the flowers.

"Scorning to wait for tuneful May
When every throat can sing,
Thou floutest Winter with thy lay,
And art thyself the Spring."

In England, too, the lark, blackbird, chaffinch, linnet, blackcap, and even the starling and yellow-hammer, have their favourites, — not in all cases owing to preference for their song, but more frequently from association. Thus Richard Jefferies, who loved all living creatures with a devotion that is seldom equalled, and who possessed a most discriminating ear, gives the lark and chaffinch a foremost place. In the pastoral scenes of Tennyson, amid the low of oxen, the plaint of tremulous poplars, and bleat of sheep from watted folds, is heard the “sightless song” of the lark, “the latest linnet’s trill,” the “mellow ouzel fluting in the elm ;” and surely it is the thrush who is referred to in the passage of “*In Memoriam*”: —

“Wild bird, whose warble, liquid-sweet,
Rings Eden thro’ the budded quicks,
O tell me where the senses mix,
O tell me where the passions meet.”

Wordsworth’s favourite bird was the cuckoo, whom he terms the “darling of the spring.” Bourdillon singles out the blackbird as “poet-laureate to Queen Spring.” Tennyson and Charles Tennyson Turner vie with each other in praise of the blackbird. David

Gray's sonnet on the thrush resounds with "his song's impassioned clarity," while John Bampfylde lauds the redbreast's "thrilling pipe," and "soft and solemn hymn." Many are the stanzas to the cushat, or ring-dove, and countless the tributes the skylark has inspired.

Here, where bird-songs differ so greatly from those of Europe, opinion is divided regarding the superior songster, individual preference being also guided by the poets, and influenced by association, — a factor that enters largely into one's estimate of many other things as well. Not only do the notes and character of bird-voices vary largely in Europe and America, but there exists an almost equal diversity with respect to the habits of the birds themselves, even to the game-birds and birds of prey. And though the nightingale does not always sing at the poet's door, he is generally to be heard in hedgerow, copse, and spinney in numerous counties, and even close to London itself. The majority of English songsters one does not need to go far afield to hear. Compared with our own, they are much more domesticated as a rule, and have a stronger, more emphatic voice, with less variety to the general chorus, in which

the notes of the chaffinch, thrush, black-bird, and skylark are the most pronounced. There is no English species, for example, whose song resembles that of our bobolink. Nor does the English choir contribute any strains resembling those of our hermit-thrush, veery, white-throat, vesper-sparrow, and little lispig warblers. The whippoorwill is unique in his wild nocturnal call, while the mocking-bird of the Southern States, like Richard Burton, a notorious borrower, has the greatest repertoire of any songster, although he is unfortunately not to be relied upon in the matter of his selections.

Wildness and plaintiveness would seem to be the distinguishing characteristics of the generality of our native singing-birds as compared to greater emphasis and vivacity on the part of their English and European congeners. With us, bird-life for the most part is shyer and more retired, many of the finest musicians haunting only the deepest woods or primeval solitudes. Our birds are consequently less known. One must go to hear them ; they do not sing at call from common, copse, and shaw. The hermit-thrush, for instance, incomparably the sweetest native song-bird, if not the su-

perior of the nightingale ; and the white-throated sparrow whose silver phrasing is one of the harmonic joys of June, are known only to the comparatively few unless as elusive strains heard faintly during their brief migratory pausings, when, as birds of passage, they sound but a fragmentary part or incomplete echo of their song. Singing amid secluded woods, they are generally unappreciated because unknown, like the white rein-orchis and pink lady-slipper that bloom unseen in dusky coverts.

The habits of many of our birds, however, are slowly undergoing a change, according to Mr. Burroughs, — their migrations are less marked ; the means of subsistence of nearly every species are vastly increased with the settlement and cultivation of the country ; insects are more numerous, and seeds of weeds and grasses more abundant ; in short, they are becoming more and more domestic, like the English birds.

Mr. Burroughs possesses in a marked degree the qualities necessary for the ornithologist, — an absorbing love for Nature, a quick and extremely discriminating eye, and a fine sensibility for sounds. To these fundamental qualities are added unceasing patience and industry, with a strong ana-

lytic faculty and almost a feminine curiosity. The results of his extended observations he has expressed in a peculiarly sympathetic and picturesque manner that at once places the reader in touch with the writer. Blithesomeness is his prevailing tone; his essays being singularly free from any tinge of pessimism or artificiality of any latter-day cult. With Stevenson and the song-sparrow he is content to sing : —

“ The world is so full of a number of things,
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings.”

His interest in Nature, as he himself has stated, is not strictly scientific. It is the bird in the tree, the fish in the water, the animal in the fields or woods, that interest him and with which he deals. Were his bent a strictly technical one, we should lack the fine flavour of his essays, his melody, his sentiment, his humour. What is seen too near is apt to be seen too prosaically ; and the laboured description of the savant does not improve the song of the bird. Some precise knowledge of ornithology, botany, entomology, or even geology, naturally renders the country-side doubly attractive ; one should have an object in view to truly appreciate Nature, —

something that will lead one from the beaten path to her less familiar scenes.

Scientific knowledge Mr. Burroughs possesses in a sufficient degree to stamp what he says with the force of one who speaks with authority, and not through the perceptivity of the poet alone. Of ornithology he says one must taste it to understand or appreciate its fascination; it cannot be satisfactorily learned from the books. The satisfaction is in learning it from Nature. One must have an original experience with the birds; the books are only the guide, the invitation.¹ But he is careful to state that a copy of Wilson or Audubon to compare notes with, is invaluable; reference to a coloured plate or to a stuffed specimen at once settling the matter of identification. His own recipe for the mastery of ornithology is doubtless the most concise and simple on record: "First find your bird; observe its ways, its calls, its flight, its haunts; then shoot it (not ogle it with a glass), and compare with Audubon. In this way the feathered kingdom may soon be conquered."

No one will question for a moment Mr. Burroughs' right to use the gun. On the

¹ "The Invitation."

other hand, one may doubt the advisability of recommending it in preference to the field-glass for every tyro to take advantage of for the "embellishment" of his cabinet, with no reference to the gain of science or the advancement of general knowledge. Many distinguished ornithologists have pursued their studies with the aid of the glass alone, which entails no destruction to the rarer species. With the exception of its employment by the intelligent, conscientious student, therefore, the use of the gun, it would seem, were best confined to the English sparrow and the hair-bird.


"There has never been a keener eye than Audubon's," the essayist adds, "though there have been more discriminating ears." Mr. Burroughs has both the eye and the ear, and he was early to find his copy of the greatest of ornithologists, — a volume now more difficult to procure than the rarest of the *Sylvicolidæ*.

Of his main subject there is little that could be said which he has not recounted; for, while treating most intelligently of many topics, it is as the choirmaster of the feathered tribes that he has contributed his most brilliant notes. His name has become almost synonymous with the song of the bird.

To think of one is to recall the other ; for with the exception of Audubon, who, however, did not possess his successor's happy delivery, the latter has probably done more to popularise ornithology — certainly to render it a fascinating study — than has any other American writer. One will remember how his first essays seemed to intone a fresh chord of Nature, as some rare musical performer draws new meanings and unfamiliar strains from a well-known aria. His touch was sure, and replete with a quality of its own. In truth, he might well have said of himself, as Marvell says in his conference with the birds and trees : —

“ Already I begin to call
In their most learned original,
And where I language want, my signs
The bird upon the bough divines,
And more attentive there doth sit
Than if he were with lime-twigs knit.”

This power of observation and gift of interpretation which are the inheritance only of the few, are alluded to by him at length : “ Success in observing Nature, as in so many other things, depends upon alertness of mind and quickness to take a hint. One's perceptive faculties must be like a trap



lightly and delicately set; a touch must suffice to spring it. One must be able to interpret the signs, to penetrate the scenes, to put this and that together. . . . The power to see things comes of that mental attitude which is directed to the now and the here: keen, alert perceptions, those faculties that lead the mind and take the incident as it flies. . . . To observe Nature and know her secrets, one needs not only a sharp eye, but a steady and a patient eye. You must look again and again, and not be misled by appearances. . . . We cannot all find the same things in Nature. She is all things to all men.¹ The botanist has one pleasure in her, the ornithologist another, the explorer another, the walker and sportsman another; what all may have is the refreshment and the exhilaration which come from a loving and intelligent scrutiny of her manifold works."² One has but to compare the works of the idyllists under present consideration to see how varied are their interpretations of Nature, and how similar things affect each observer in a different

¹ Some men have their eyes naturally intended to the one and some to the other object. — THOREAU: *A Week*.


² *Ri-ver-by*, pp. 91, 119, 265, 272.

234 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

degree. For Nature is like a prism which casts many different lights, according to the angle of reflection or the circumstances and conditions under which she is regarded. Like the notes of the oriole, that change with each succeeding year, she is full of renewed surprises, and to each individual may contribute a different meaning, or voice a novel strain.

Recalling Mr. Burroughs' numerous volumes, one finds borne out in them the idea expressed by Thoreau that the more one writes on any given subject, the more there remains to write about it, if one continue to study it assiduously. One may, perhaps, miss some of the fine grace-notes and buoyant enthusiasm of his earlier works in the author's later essays; but his touch still remains eminently pure and sweet, and fresh facts and interesting information still continue to reward the listener. And whether Whitman be the hierophant he would fain accord him the distinction of being, on the occasions when the latter flits from birds to leaves of grass, there can be no exception taken to the high plane that their gifted exponent has assigned to his favourite minstrels of wood and field.

Living on a great bird-highway, the



Hudson, his opportunities for observation have been unusually favourable. But even here a knowledge of localities is essential, — the distribution of its avi-fauna being very marked. South of the author's residence-village, one species abounds; north of it, another. In only one locality does the hooded-warbler occur, while but a single precinct within the author's range seems to possess attractions for all comers, where almost the entire ornithology of the State has its summer *rendez-vous*. This consists of a tangle of cedar and chestnut-trees, dogwood, water-beech, swamp-ash, elder, and hazel, with an undergrowth in many places of heath and bramble, threaded by a stream in close proximity to the village, — the abundance of insects and absence of predatory birds accounting for its popularity.

Yet though the Hudson Highlands are his chief seat of observation, his have been no mere saunterings amid the adjacent hills and copses. During his multitudinous wanderings he has journeyed widely, — with the halcyon in Canada, the mocking-bird in the South, the pine-finch in the Adirondacks, and the nightingale in England. Thus he has not only his native species at command, but

is equally able to draw comparisons between them and their relatives of the mother country.

Similar to Thoreau, Jefferies, and White, he is a born observer, with an especial eye for the birds ; and, like every author whose charm is enduring, he has written to please himself upon topics with which he is thoroughly at home. His critical faculty is always marked, his epigram poignant, and his humour pervasive. If there is a fact to be had, he is not content until he has attained it. To him a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. With the squirrel he would extract the kernel. He likes to peer beneath the surface, to strip the husk and rind, to get at the pith and marrow of things.

Of Thoreau he has clearly been a diligent student, though free from the transcendentalism and vagaries of the Walden poet-philosopher. With Jefferies he has little kinship, either in the descriptive, poetic, or artistic traits which so strongly characterise the prose-poet of the Wiltshire downs. The colour-perceptivity of both Jefferies and Thoreau is absent from his pages ; and in the presentation of his themes the major usually dominates the minor key. But to say that he is wanting in a true appreciation

of the beauties of Nature, or is not kin to the poet in mirroring some of her subtler, more evasive moods were misleading, and would belie many of his essays which one may re-read with renewed pleasure.

There is a tare or teazle or tenacious seed-pod that he has borne away from some distant solitude, where the veery sings, invariably clinging to his raiment; and as he passes by, one scents the *Linnæa*, the breath of mosses, and cool fragrance of *Osmundias*. One notes an alternate flash and a quiet twinkle in his eye as he rambles on with elastic stride, parting the bushes for birds' nests; and one fancies his ears continually moving, like those of a hare, intent upon catching the slightest sound from the treetops above. A nod brings down the oven-bird to a lower spray, and at his call the vireo flutters above his head.

Constantly an attentive spectator of the sylvan pageant, there is a keen edge to all his impressions. What he has chronicled, has been verified and matured by infinite patience and care. The hunter, the trapper, the naturalist, the angler, the botanist, the geologist, are combined in his pages. They breathe of out-of-doors, and exhale the spicy smell of leafy ways. His birds

pipe and carol, and wing one direct to their haunts. No tangle is too dense to screen the pewee from his discerning glance, or rocky ledge too remote to conceal the phoebe's lichened nest. His ear is pitched to the most evasive accords. Amid the complex symphony of the summer choir, he detects the faintest chirp of the snow bird and trill of the tiniest warbler. Any unusual note by an individual performer is at once heard and recognised. His is no cabinet of the taxidermist ; every bird in his vast aviary is alive. The partridge drums, the wood-dove coos, the downy woodpecker beats his reveille.

Sauntering with him on the springy carpet of ground-pine, amid the fragrant aisles of the hemlocks, where the outer glare becomes tempered to a delicious twilight, one is arrested by the warble of the red-eyed fly-catcher, who sings almost unceasingly from May to August, throughout the day, a cheerful lay of industry and contentment. He is a slim, fair-sized bird, with a faint bluish crown, and a light line over the eye. The slate-coloured snow-bird — the finest architect of any of the ground-builders — chirps sharply. The voice of the winter-wren — a tremulous,

vibrating tongue of silver — fills the dim aisles as if aided by some marvellous sounding-board. A rufous-coloured bird flits quickly past, alighting on a low limb to salute the listener with “Whew! whew!” or “Whoit! whoit!” almost as if one were whistling for a dog; it is the call-note of the veery, or Wilson’s thrush, whose resonant, plaintive chords are one of the sweetest minors of the woods. Out of the tall hemlocks proceeds a very fine insect-like warble from a deep-orange or flame-coloured throat and breast; the back, variegated black and white. The orange-throated warbler would seem to be his right name; but he is doomed to wear the name of some discoverer, perhaps the first who robbed his nest or rifled him of his mate, — Blackburn, — hence, Blackburnian warbler. A noticeable strain, sharp and sibilant, oftener heard in the upland woods of beech and maple, is uttered by the smallest and handsomest of all the warblers, — the blue yellow-back. Everywhere amid the hemlocks is heard the pensive, pathetic cry of the wood-pewee, together with the rich note of the scarlet tanager, who glows like a live coal against the dark background. Presently, after a lengthy prelude, the golden-crowned thrush bursts

into an ecstasy of song, — clear, ringing, copious, — rivalling the goldfinch's in vivacity, and the linnet's in melody. The rose-breasted grossbeak sounds a strong, vivacious strain, — a bright noonday song, full of health and assurance. Here and there the delicate, tender strain of the black-and-white creeping-warbler is heard, reminding one of hair-wire. The black-throated blue-back warbler, too, murmurs his languid midsummer note, “twea, twea, twea-e-e!” in the upward slide, and with the peculiar *z-ing* of summer insects, — one of the most languid, unhurried sounds in all the woods. The purple-finch, or linnet, sits somewhat apart, and warbles most exquisitely, — his song approaching an ecstasy, the variety so great, and the song so rapid, that the impression is as of two or three birds singing simultaneously. The call of the robin he brings in at a certain point with marked effect. At intervals the cowbird utters his peculiar liquid, glassy note from the tops of trees, the Maryland yellow-throat pronounces his singularly brilliant and emphatic warble, while the black-throated green-backed warbler, ground-warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, and scores of other songsters that utter their distinguishing notes, are

equally well rendered by this idyllist of the birds.¹

But all of these are merely minor notes in the chorus of his pastorals; it is really the hermit-thrush that forms the true incentive for his saunterings. I suspect that this songster is at the bottom of his love for ornithology. "To me it is the finest sound in Nature," he says. "I often hear him a long way off,—sometimes over a quarter of a mile away,—when only the stronger and more perfect parts of his music reach me; and through the general chorus of wrens and warblers I detect this sound rising pure and serene, as if a spirit from some remote height were slowly chanting a divine accompaniment. This song appeals to the sentiment of the beautiful in me, and suggests a serene religious beatitude, as no other sound in Nature does. It realises a peace and a deep solemn joy that only the finest souls may know."

For sweetness, limpidity, and melody, combined with power of wordless expression, certainly the anthem of the hermit has no equal among Nature's voices. It were something gained to have caught but the echo of his angelic strain; it is as though

¹ "In the Hemlocks."

he were blowing through a tube of refined gold, summoning the sylvan deities to prayer. One hearkens to his airy chant, and the leafy labyrinths become a temple hallowed by the incense of his song. Reverberating clear and sweet through the forest's deepest recesses, — the most seraphic utterance of the wildwood, — floats his ecstatic *O, leo, leo, leo; A, lea, lea, lea; E, lei, lei, lei!* Hearing him, one realises why autumn woods are brown and summer skies are blue.

Though bird-melody usually reaches its *crescendo* during May and June, when its most tuneful strains are engendered, there is an April chorus which should not be overlooked by all who can appreciate the singular medley of the trumpeters of the spring. The sportsman in quest of the snipe that twists away with raucous cry from the tussocks of plashy sproutlands, or brimming wood-lots fringed by trees, is, perhaps, most familiar with this prelude overture, — a combination of swamp and woods, or pools of water with trees, being a necessary condition for its production. This is the true exordium of the year, or rather the inaugural attuning of instruments that are to join in the summer oratorio.

You may hear it in its most riotous intensity on some bland mid-April day, when a haze of heat hangs over the fields, and the sprays of trees begin to drape the landscape with a variegated scarf of colour. It is heard ere the first marsh-marigolds have lighted their lamps, or the shad-blow has silvered the hillsides. It comes with the bloodroot's opening corolla, the brighter gleam of golden willows, and the lesser dogwood's ruddier flame. Its performers are numerous, and not entirely confined to the birds. Responsive to the grateful warmth, countless hylodes are loud with song, to which the plaintive *tremolo* of toads, and hoarse croaking of frogs, form a running accompaniment. From the distant fields rises the strong wiry call of the meadow-lark, blended with the sonorous cawing of crows, the bush-sparrow's joyous chime, and the kildeer's pensive cry. Near by, the willow catkins and scarlet-maple buds are murmurous with bees innumerable hiving the pollen and sweets. Bluebirds carol and robins warble, while song-sparrows and various migrants pipe and trill. The loud challenge of the flicker vibrates through the grove, the kingfisher winds his reel, and from far in the thicket a wood-dove moans.

Dominating all other sounds is the clamorous rhapsody strummed by the grackles, blackbirds, and starlings, — a very Babel of mingled discord and harmony. But precisely what instruments are employed by the dusky flocks as they flit from tree to tree, or disport amid the reeds, it were difficult to define. The grackle, it is not improbable, employs a hurdy-gurdy, if not a Turkish *nagara*, or a Chinese gong-chime. Assuredly, his is the most obstreperous medium of clangor. The starling's merry *okalee!* it were perplexing to find a parallel for; while the fluid flutings of the blackbird are so drowned by the noisier instrumentation of his fellows that one vainly attempts to trace the exact instrument he fingers. In some occult way, notwithstanding, these swarthy musicians, who remain closely banded together, and fife and strum in frenzied concert, contribute a performance the reverse of unpleasing. For, despite its stridor, one recognises, as its underlying and pervading motive, a hilarious acclaim to the new year, — a joyous hosanna expressive of the mere pleasure of existence and rapture in the golden hour.

From all these vernal musicians, seemingly vying with one another for suprem-

acy, there arises a various fantasia peculiar to the spring alone. The atmosphere rings and quivers with a *Czardas* of many keys, rising and falling in fitful waves of sound. There is a scraping of bows and twanging of strings, with growlings from viols and grace-notes from flutes, a fanfare of bagpipes, of timbrels, and of fifes, joined to the consonance of citherns and guitars. No director other than the tempered April day leads this strange overture of the swamps and lowlands, which commences with the morn and closes with the twilight, when the hylode hosts alone continue to pipe to the evening star. Heard thus in the full chorus of the springtide, it seems not unlike the tuning of a vast orchestra for the performance that is to follow, — the call and summons for the flowers and leaves, the song and melody that are to be ! It is the grand *Frühlingslied* of the year ; and, hearing it, one may already scent the sweet-brier, and anticipate the smile of June.

With the hermit, wood, and golden-crowned thrush, the veery, winter-wren, linnet, and white-throat, the field or vesper sparrow is a prime favourite with Mr. Burroughs. His reference to the latter may be aptly cited as an instance of the

author's faculty of placing the particular bird he treats of unmistakably before the reader. Surely no one unacquainted with the grass-finch, or field-sparrow, could fail to recognise him after reading the monograph in *Wake Robin* : —

“ Have you heard the song of the field-sparrow ? If you have lived in a pastoral country, with broad upland pastures, you could hardly have missed him. The two white lateral quills in his tail, and his habit of running and skulking in advance of you as you walk through the fields, are sufficient to identify him. Not in meadows or orchards, but in high, breezy pasture-grounds, will you look for him. His song is most noticeable after sundown, when other birds are silent, for which reason he has been aptly termed the vesper-sparrow. The farmer, following his team from the field at dusk, catches his sweetest strain. His song is not so brisk and varied as that of the song-sparrow, being softer and wilder, sweeter, and more plaintive. Add the best parts of the lay of the latter to the sweet vibrating chant of the wood-sparrow, and you have the evening hymn of the vesper-bird, — the poet of the plain, unadorned pastures. On every side, near and remote,

from out the short grass, which the herds are cropping, the strain rises. Two or three long silver notes of peace and rest, ending in some subdued trills and quavers, constitute each separate song. Often you will catch only one or two of the bars, the breeze having blown the minor part away. Such unambitious, quiet, unconscious melody! It is one of the most characteristic sounds in Nature. The grass, the stones, the stubble, the furrow, the quiet herds, and the warm twilight among the hills, are all subtly expressed in this song.¹

¹ The bird upon the tree utters the meaning of the wind, — a voice of the grass and wild flower, words of the green leaf; they speak through that slender tone. Sweetness of dew and rifts of sunshine, the dark hawthorn touched with breadths of open bud, the odour of the air, the colour of the daffodil, — all that is delicious and beloved of spring-time are expressed in his song. Genius is Nature, and his lay, like the sap in the bough from which he sings, rises without thought. Nor is it necessary that it should be a song; a few short notes in the sharp spring morning are sufficient to stir the heart. But yesterday the least of them all came to a bough by my window, and in his call I heard the sweet-brier wind rushing over the young grass. — RICHARD JEFFERIES: "Hours Of Spring."

248 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

One wonders, nevertheless, when considering Mr. Burroughs' natural love of harmony, and his aptitude for analysing sounds and bird-voices, why he should fall into line with all the rest, and bestow such unqualified praise on the strain of the wood-thrush. To be sure, the bird is a well-mannered songster, whose presence is always welcome, and whose efforts are not to be despised. But the frog in his throat — the wood-frog, as distinguished from the great marsh chorister — or the snapped bow-strings of his instrument sadly mar his performance, however well intended it may be. Despite some of his fluid bars, his discords jar upon the ear, the final notes being invariably out of key, and reminding one of the gutturals of the crow blackbird. Were he more shy, and his voice further removed, he were infinitely more melodious. For has not Wordsworth recorded for his especial consideration, —

“ sweetest melodies

Are those that are by distance made more sweet ” ?

Heard from afar, some of his notes are most liquid and musical ; but, near by, his jerky trills, and the grackle-like termination

of his strain, are certainly the reverse of pleasing, and do not merit such encomiums as "royal minstrel," or that he is "worthy of all, and more than all, the praises he has received."¹

I fancy the crack in his voice has become more pronounced of late years, if withal he has not developed a tendency to chronic bronchitis. His phrasing grows less dulcet as he continues to approach nearer the habitation of man and the shriek of the sparrow, — in inverse ratio to the increasing melodiousness of the great green *Rana* who blows up the breeze of the summer night, and the fragrance of pond-lilies from the depths of his sonorous bassoon. Or has he been so petted and praised that he simply sings on his reputation, like some husky Mario or Wachtel, who no more might "soothe with a tenor note"?

A minstrel of no extraordinary merit, he has been accepted and pushed into prominence, rather than having deserved his place through any notable quality of vocalisation. His name, moreover, has a mellifluous sound; in pronouncing it one thinks of the mavis and the throstle, of Chaucer

¹ "The Return Of The Birds."

250 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

and Tennyson, of Spenser's green arcades,
and of Burns'

"Sing on, sweet thrush, upon the leafless bough,
Sing on, sweet bird, I listen to thy strain."

Were the robin termed the "garden-thrush," no doubt his lay were doubly sweet. The hermit is chanting his *muezzin* from the minarets of the pines in distant coverts, and the veery singing his *Ave Maria* amid sequestered swamps, while the wood-thrush quavers almost at one's door, and by his very persistency courts attention as an accomplished musician.

Let him sing on, by all means, — and with the enchantment of distance his is a charming song, — only let us not ascribe to him all the cardinal virtues, and lose sight of those who are infinitely his masters in melody. Both Audubon and Wilson are comparatively silent as to the song of *solitarius*, while eulogising that of *melodus*; and Nuttall, from his description of their vocal abilities, would seem to have confounded the three. Even Thoreau does not mention the principal songster; and one must needs suppose, therefore, that at least some of his beautiful tributes to the wood-thrush were inspired by, and intended for, the former.

This is the more probable when one considers the Walden poet's somewhat faulty ornithology, of which his "night-warbler" is an instance.

At all events, the wood-thrush must be regarded as a much-overrated minstrel. But it is the custom to praise him, just as one is expected to laud the Venus di Medici, or extol Thomson's "Seasons;" and thus, undoubtedly, Mr. Burroughs has been led to neglect the claims of the frog, the oriole, and the whippoorwill, and join in the general pæan. Who was first to patronise the bird, it were difficult to trace; but, his place once assigned, he has continued to be accepted without a protest as a paragon of song. As so much confusion exists in discriminating between several species of the family, notably the hermit, veery, and wood-thrush, —and many persons are entirely unacquainted with the former two, — it may also be assumed that the latter is frequently mistaken for his superiors through ignorance, or is simply accepted without examination of his merits. "*Nous louons ce qui est loué, bien plus que ce qui est louable,*" says La Bruyère; and Mr. Burroughs, in this instance, proves no exception to the general rule.

It should be stated, notwithstanding, in justice to him, that he acknowledges having heard an individual performer with a falsetto voice,—finding fault also with the bird for spending so much time in tuning his instrument. In an inadvertent moment, thinking no doubt of the incomparable strain of the hermit, he even calls attention to his “careless and uncertain touches.” This is so much more than any one else has dared to insinuate that he may well be excused for his allegiance to a grounded ornithological dogma, any noticeable wavering from which were punishable by excommunication. Still it must be remembered there is a vast difference in the merits of individual performers,—notably in the family under consideration,—and that the song of a species often varies largely in different localities. It may be Mr. Burroughs’ thrushes of the Catskills are an exception, and are less subject to laryngeal troubles than the rank and file. I fancy I hear him reply: “Your criticism of the wood-thrush is interesting, but a little perverse. He has no frog in his throat here. His charm is in that liquid, golden note, ‘holy be,’ or ‘glory be.’ It is the quality of his voice, and not his power of song. I suppose

we overpraise all bird-songs and all phases of Nature; they are what we make them."

Assuredly, Master Melodus, whom I hear at this moment from his chosen tree in the adjoining grove, to say nothing of his brethren, has a distinct wheeze. For a fortnight he has sung persistently, beginning with the dawn, and continuing almost unceasingly until dusk. Yet how vivaciously he sounds his invitation to the bourgeoning sprays, and with what jocund trills he installs the morn! The thunder holds no terrors for him, and apparently he rejoices in the rain. Methinks he is singing with a purpose, and a challenge for the recognition of his powers. He has drowned the clamour of the sparrow and the hair-bird; he has summoned the shad-blow and the lilac bloom; the spiræas and burning-bush, the *Trilliums* and meadow-rue have responded to his *scherzo*; and has he not called me out repeatedly to bask in the joys of the vernal morning?

How I should miss him were he silent! His presence grows upon me; his hilarity is infectious. The little cluck, or double *appoggiatura*, he utters at intervals between his strains, or uses as a preliminary flourish

to his lay, is so naïve and wild. And how lovely the spots upon his breast ! — his heart-shaped spots, typical of the merry heart within. With what leisurely grace he flits from his favourite perch to occasionally lavish his song upon those who may not appreciate it as well as I, — I, who know its every trill and semi-breve and quaver. Involuntarily I find myself repeating the couplet of Burns. Meseems his voice may not be so husky, after all. And even were it so, might it not naturally follow from his unremitting efforts to please ? Certainly, he flings many a mellow stave through my open windows from his loft in the great chestnut hard by.

Perchance I have misjudged him, or have failed to interpret his song aright. Are there not discords in the *Meistersinger* and the *Faschingschwank* ; and where may one seek absolute perfection here below ? How he must laugh at me in his sleeve for attempting to tell him how he should sing, — he whose utterance is a natural effluence of the wild-wood ; a carol he has learned from the wind in its converse with the tree-tops, and the brook that purls over pebbly shallows. Mayhap I owe him the apology I feel sure he has already granted, — he is so

sunny, so mirthful, so full of sweet accords. The garden were doubly lonely without him. I marvel will he flood it with his *allegro* when dawns another May?

The birds which Mr. Burroughs has dealt with so fully are not his only attractions of the country-side. The woods and fields wherein they dwell, with the trees, the flora, and the wild creatures, are defined with almost equal precision. The all-absorbing topic of the weather he has discussed in its multifarious signs and bearings; and though one may question whether he is a strictly accomplished angler, he has given us a portrait of the speckled-trout which makes one eager to follow him along the Catskill brooks. A fox passes by in all his furtive grace: "it is to the eye what a flowing measure is to the mind, so easy, so buoyant, — the furry creature drifting along like a large red thistle-down, or like a plume borne by the wind." He hearkens to the faint wandering vernal call of the little owl — "a curious musical undertone hardly separable from the silence; a bell muffled in feathers, tolling in the twilight of the woods, and discernible only to the most alert ear." And even as well defined as his references to the birds are his essays on

"The Pastoral Bees," and "An Idyl of the Honey-Bee." Here also his magnifying-glass and telescope possess a larger field and keener focussing-power than is usually the case, and serve to bring new facts and observations to light.

Yet while pretending to look for flowers and foxes and bees, he is constantly brushing birds' nests, or detecting some new note, which leads him back to his favourite topic. This is at once apparent, for example, on reading his interesting account of an excursion to the summit of Slide Mountain, — his extremely fatiguing tramp having quite another object than a mere review of the geology and topography of the heart of the Southern Catskills. Whoever reads between the lines can readily perceive that the mountain was really only an excuse for an introduction to a new songster; and while apparently intent on perusing *The Testimony Of The Rocks*, he was stealthily peering amid the trees, and listening wistfully for a novel strain. Of course the bird did not disappoint him, nor was he disappointed in the bird. At last his song became audible amid the susurrus of the primitive firs, revealing itself as that of the rare Bicknell's thrush, peculiar in the State,

if not in the Middle States, to this mountain alone. The song of this species he describes as in a minor key, — finer, more attenuated, and more under the breath than that of any other thrush, — like a musical whisper of great sweetness and power; . . . a strain as fine as if blown upon a fairy flute, — a suppressed musical whisper from out the tops of the dark spruces. This song appeared to him to possess in a more marked degree the quality of interior reverberation than any other thrush song with which he was familiar. Would the altitude or the situation account for its minor key? — a situation where loudness would avail little, sounds being not far heard on a mountain-top, but becoming lost in the abyss of vacant air. And so amid the dense dark ranks of the spruces this fine musical whisper seemed but the soft hum of the balsams embodied in a bird's voice.¹

Indeed, Mr. Burroughs' pages ring continually with the music of Chaucer's lines :

“ And in I went to hear the birdis song,
Which on the braunchis both in plain and vale
So loud ysang, that all the wood yrong.” ♦

¹ *Riverby*: “The Heart of the Southern Catskills.”

The birds he wishes to hear he can always find; but the elusive orchid, Calypso, evades him. The adder's-tongue, or Erythronium, with its yellow, nodding flower, perplexes him not a little; much as the swallows puzzled Gilbert White. It is no question of migration, as in the case of the latter, but how the old bulb burrows so deeply into the ground. Why, in like manner, is its tulip-scented blossom revolute in the sunshine, and one of its two leaves almost double the width of the other? Why do the rhizomes of the Turk's-cap and Canadense lilies turn in any direction when shooting out the new bulb? Why is the *Trillium* a triple triangle in leaf calyx and flower? Why does the sunflower veer to the sun, the evening primrose open at night, and many flowers fold their petals at the close of day? If the flowers were birds, the Catskill essayist would, no doubt, have solved these and many other questions in his own original way, and save one the trouble of turning to the more prosaic scientists, or doing without an answer altogether.

Whether salt possesses any efficacy in attracting song-birds, providing it be skillfully employed, is a question he has not

touched upon. Neither has he contributed any prescription to aid the country in exterminating, or at least lessening, the increasing hordes of the English sparrow, — the enemy of the songsters he cherishes, and the most discordant member of the feathered kingdom.

Similar to Richard Jefferies, Mr. Burroughs has written but one rhymed poem, "Waiting," which might have been composed by Thoreau, and in a vague way recalls Lowell's "Seaweed": —

"Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
• Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea ;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For, lo ! my own shall come to me.

"I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace ?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

"Asleep, awake, by night or day,
The friends I seek are seeking me ;
No wind can drive my bark astray,
Nor change the tide of destiny.

"What matter if I stand alone ?
I wait with joy the coming years ;
My heart shall reap where it has sown,
And garner up its fruit of tears.

260 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

“The waters know their own, and draw
The brook that springs in yonder height ;
So flows the good with equal law
Unto the soul of pure delight.

“The stars come nightly to the sky ;
The tidal-wave unto the sea ;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me.”

Strangely, the catbird, whose motley spring diapason is familiar to all, has been neglected by Mr. Burroughs as a minstrel of a high degree of merit. His claims for admiration come somewhat late, it is true ; and in his florison of song he reverses the accustomed order of his companions. He belongs with the purple aster, the gentian, and the witch-hazel, which bloom when summer's fires have cooled ; and, like them, he serves to cheer the declining year. For not in April, when wind-flowers nod to the south breeze, and columbines plume the awakening woodlands, does he lift a musical voice. Neither in the June twilight, nor sultry August noon, does he choose to reveal the true cadence of his song. But when the grasshoppers' drone is faint, and crickets have wellnigh ceased their cry ; when groves turn crimson, and fruits hang

red on the bough, —then the catbird pipes his vespers to the waning year. You may hear his pensive song in October, — his tender warble to the flowers and the sunshine, the showers and the dew, the blue sky and the blithe summer hours which have flown. He sings, in like measure, the mellow October days, the ripened nuts, and lengthening shadows. He chants the violet haze, the golden afterglow, the garnered sheaves and rustling leaves. The peace and serenity of the latter year flow from his throat as he pours out his autumnal psalm in low, plaintive strains, like some tender chord of Chopin freighted with indefinable yearning.

Methinks, too, in his blither summer moods, while echoing the burden of many of his fellow-songsters, he is busily repeating the joyous summons to the birds invoked by Aristophanes of old, — *Epopopopopopopopopoi! io! io!* come, come, come, come hither, each of my fellow-birds, as many as feed upon the well-sown lands of the husbandmen, countless tribes of barley-eaters, and swift-flying flocks of rooks, sending forth a gentle voice, and as many as in the furrows incessantly twitter around the clods so lightly with blithesome voice! *tio*,

262 *Idyllists of the Country-Side.*

tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio ! and as many of you as have your pasture in gardens on the boughs of the ivy, and you throughout the mountains, and you that eat wild olive-berries, and you that eat the fruit of the arbutus, fly quickly to my voice, *trioto, trioto, totobrix !*"

But if the catbird has not read Aristophanes, and this be not the true purport of his summer recitative, Mr. Burroughs has assuredly caught the spirit of the apostrophe of the Greek poet, and has the feathered legions at his beck and call. He has but to whisper, *io ! io !* to summon the tenants of the remotest woodlands, and forthwith portray their song and plumage, from the finest lisp and semi-quaver to the minutest barbule and wing-feather. He has given us the living, singing bird as he exists in his native haunts, with the trees and flowers and sky that encompass him, of which his song is the expression and the emanation.

It is a far-cry from the Dove to the Concord, from the Hanger of Selborne to the hedgerows of Wiltshire. Yet however varied the strain or distinct the aria among those who have so fervently voiced the de-

lights of the Country-Side, there exists, nevertheless, a chord of unison that places them in lasting relationship. In his own way each has reflected the soul of Nature and conveyed the spirit of Earth. To Walton his silver streams, and to White his beechen groves ; to Hardy the purple heath, and to Jefferies the golden corn ; to Thoreau the mystery of the night, and to Burroughs the song of the bird !

THE END.

1

•

